

ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

A WEEKLY JOURNAL.

CONDUCTED BY CHARLES DICKENS.

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED HOUSEHOLD WORDS.

N^o. 146.]

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 1862.

[PRICE 2d.]

A STRANGE STORY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "MY NOVEL," "RIENZI," &c.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

My Work, my Philosophical Work—the ambitious hope of my intellectual life—how eagerly I returned to it again! Far away from my household grief, far away from my haggard perplexities. Neither a Lilian nor a Margrave there!

As I went over what I had before written, each link in its chain of reasoning seemed so serried, that to alter one were to derange all: and the whole reasoning was so opposed to the possibility of the wonders I myself had experienced, so hostile to the subtle hypotheses of a Faber, or the childlike belief of an Amy, that I must have destroyed the entire work if I had admitted such contradictions to its design!

But the work was I myself! I, in my solid, sober, healthful mind, before the brain had been perplexed by a phantom. Were phantoms to be allowed as testimonies against science? No; in returning to my Book, I returned to my former Me!

How strange is that contradiction between our being as man and our being as author! Take any writer enamoured of a system—a thousand things may happen to him every day which might shake his faith in that system; and while he moves about as mere man, his faith is shaken. But when he settles himself back into the phase of his being as author, the mere act of taking pen in hand and smoothing the paper before him, restores his speculations to their ancient mechanical train. The system, the beloved system, re-asserts its tyrannic sway, and he either ignores, or moulds into fresh proofs of his theory as author, all which, an hour before, had given his theory the lie in his living perceptions as man.

I adhered to my system: I continued my work. Here, in the barbarous desert, was a link between me and the Cities of Europe. All else might break down under me. The love I had dreamed of was blotted out from the world and might never be restored; my hearth might be lonely, my life be an exile's. My reason might, at last, give way before the spectres which awed my senses, or the sorrows which stormed my heart. But here, at least, was a monument of my rational thoughtful Me—of my indivi-

dualised identity in multiform creation. And my mind, in the noon of its force, would shed its light on the earth when my form was resolved to its elements. Alas! in this very yearning for the Hereafter, though but the Hereafter of a Name, could I see only the craving of Mind, and hear not the whisper of Soul?

The avocations of a colonist, usually so active, had little interest for me. This vast territorial lordship, in which, could I have endeared its possession by the hopes that animate a Founder, I should have felt all the zest and the pride of ownership, was but the run of a common to the passing emigrant, who would leave no sons to inherit the tardy products of his labour. I was not goaded to industry by the stimulus of need. I could only be ruined if I risked all my capital in the attempt to improve. I lived, therefore, amongst my fertile pastures, as careless of culture as the English occupant of the Highland moor, which he rents for the range of its solitudes.

I knew, indeed, that if ever I became avaricious, I might swell my modest affluence into absolute wealth. I had revisited the spot in which I had discovered the nugget of gold, and had found the precious metal in rich abundance just under the first coverings of the alluvial soil. I concealed my discovery from all. I knew that did I proclaim it, the charm of my Bush-life would be gone. My fields would be infested by all the wild adventurers who gather to gold as the vultures of prey round a carcase; my servants would desert me, my very flocks would be shepherdless!

Months again rolled on months. I had just approached the close of my beloved Work, when it was again suspended, and by an anguish keener than all which I had previously known.

Lilian became alarmingly ill. Her state of health, long gradually declining, had hitherto admitted chequered intervals of improvement, and exhibited no symptoms of actual danger. But now she was seized with a kind of chronic fever, attended with absolute privation of sleep, an aversion to even the lightest nourishment, and an acute nervous susceptibility to all the outward impressions, of which she had long seemed so unconscious; morbidly alive to the faintest sound, shrinking from the light as from a torture. Her previous impatience at my entrance into her room became aggravated into vehement emotions, convulsive paroxysms of

distress. So that Faber banished me from her chamber, and, with a heart bleeding at every fibre, I submitted to the cruel sentence.

Faber had taken up his abode in my house and brought Amy with him; one or the other never left Lilian, night or day. The great physician spoke doubtfully of the case, but not despairingly.

"Remember," he said, "that, in spite of the want of sleep, the abstinence from food, the form has not wasted as it would do, were this fever inevitably mortal. It is upon that phenomenon I build a hope that I have not been mistaken in the opinion I hazarded from the first. We are now in the midst of the critical struggle between life and reason; if she preserve the one, my conviction is that she will regain the other. That seeming antipathy to yourself is a good omen. You are inseparably associated with her intellectual world; in proportion as she revives to it, must become vivid and powerful the reminiscences of the shock that annulled, for a time, that world to her. So I welcome, rather than fear, the over susceptibility of the awakening senses to external sights and sounds. A few days will decide if I am right. In this climate the progress of acute maladies is swift, but the recovery from them is yet more startlingly rapid. Wait—endure—be prepared to submit to the will of Heaven; but do not despond of its mercy."

I rushed away from the consoler—away into the thick of the forests, the heart of the solitude. All around me, there, was joyous with life; the locusts sang amidst the herbage; the cranes gambolled on the banks of the creek; the squirrel-like opossums frolicked on the feathery boughs. "And what," said I to myself—"what if that which seems so fabulous in the distant being, whose existence has bewitched my own, be substantially true? What if to some potent medicament Margrave owes his glorious vitality, his radiant youth? Oh! that I had not so disdainfully turned away from his hinted solicitations—to what?—to nothing guiltier than lawful experiment. Had I been less devoted a bigot to this vain schoolcraft, which we call the Medical Art, and which, alone in this age of science, has made no perceptible progress since the days of its earliest teachers—had I said in the true humility of genuine knowledge, 'these alchemists were men of genius and thought; we owe to them nearly all the grand hints of our chemical science—is it likely that they would have been wholly drivellers and idiots in the one faith they clung to the most?'—had I said that, I might now have no fear of losing my Lilian. Why, after all, should there not be in Nature one primary essence, one master substance, in which is stored the specific nutriment of life?"

Thus incoherently muttering to the woods what my pride of reason would not have suffered me gravely to say to my fellow-men, I fatigued my tormented spirits into a gloomy calm, and mechanically retraced my steps at the decline of day. I seated myself at the door of my solitary log-hut, leaning my cheek upon my hand, and

musings. Wearily I looked up, roused by a discord of clattering hoofs and lumbering wheels on the hollow-sounding grass track. A crazy, groaning vehicle, drawn by four horses, emerged from the copse of gum-trees—fast, fast along the road, which no such pompous vehicle had traversed since that which had borne me—luxurious satrap for an early colonist—to my lodge in the wilderness. What emigrant rich enough to squander, in the hire of such an equipage, more than its cost in England, could thus be entering on my waste domain? An ominous thrill shot through me.

The driver—perhaps some broken-down son of huxury in the Old World, fit for nothing in the New World but to ply for hire, the task that might have led to his ruin when plied in sport—stopped at the door of my hut, and called out, "Friend, is not this the great Fenwick Section, and is not yonder long pile of building the Master's house?"

Before I could answer I heard a faint voice, within the vehicle, speaking to the driver; the last nodded, descended from his seat, opened the carriage-door, and offered his arm to a man, who, waving aside the proffered aid, descended slowly and feebly; paused a moment as if for breath, and then, leaning on his staff, walked from the road, across the sward rank with luxuriant herbage, through the little gate in the new-set fragrant wattle-fence, wearily, languidly, halting often, till he stood facing me, leaning both van emaciated hands upon his staff, and his meagre form shrinking deep within the folds of a cloak lined thick with costly sables. His face was sharp, his complexion of a livid yellow, his eyes shone out from their hollowed orbits, unnaturally enlarged and fatally bright. Thus, in ghastly contrast to his former splendour of youth and opulence of life, Margrave stood before me.

"I come to you," said Margrave, in accents hoarse and broken, "from the shores of the East. Give me shelter and rest. I have that to say which will more than repay you."

Whatever, till that moment, my hate and my fear of this unexpected visitant, hate would have been inhumanity, fear a meanness—conceived for a creature so awfully stricken down.

Silently, involuntarily, I led him into the house. There he rested a few minutes, with closed eyes and painful gasps for breath. Meanwhile, the driver brought from the carriage a travelling-bag and a small wooden chest or coffer, strongly banded with iron clamps. Margrave, looking up as the man drew near, exclaimed fiercely, "Who told you to touch that chest? How dare you? Take it from that man, Fenwick! Place it here—here, by my side!"

I took the chest from the driver, whose rising anger at being so imperiously rated in the land of democratic equality, was appeased by the gold which Margrave lavishly flung to him.

"Take care of the poor gentleman, squire," he whispered to me, in the spontaneous impulse of gratitude, "I fear he will not trouble you

long. He must be monstrous rich. Arrived in a vessel hired all to himself and a train of outlandish attendants, whom he has left behind in the town yonder! May I bait my horses in your stables? They have come a long way."

I pointed to the neighbouring stables, and the man nodded his thanks, remounted his box, and drove off.

I returned to Margrave. A faint smile came to his lips as I placed the chest beside him.

"Ay, ay!" he muttered. "Safe, safe! I shall soon be well again—very soon! And now I can sleep in peace!"

I led him into an inner room, in which there was a bed. He threw himself on it with a loud sigh of relief. Soon, half raising himself on his elbow, he exclaimed, "The chest—bring it hither! I need it always beside me! There, there! Now a few hours of sleep; and then, if I can take food, or some such restoring cordial as your skill may suggest, I shall be strong enough to talk. We will talk!—we will talk!"

His eyes closed heavily as his voice fell into a drowsy mutter. A moment more and he was asleep.

I watched beside him, in mingled wonder and compassion. Looking into that face so altered, yet still so young, I could not sternly question what had been the evil of that mystic life, which seemed now oozing away through the last sands in the hour-glass. I placed my hand softly on his pulse: it scarcely beat. I put my ear to his breast, and involuntarily sighed, as I distinguished in its fluttering heave that dull, dumb sound, in which the heart seems knelling itself to the greedy grave!

Was this, indeed, the potent magician whom I had so feared? This the guide to the Rosicrucian's secret of life's renewal, in whom, but an hour or two ago, my fancies gulled my credulous trust?

But suddenly, even while thus chiding my wild superstitions,—a fear that to most will seem scarcely less superstitious, shot across me. Could Lillian be affected by the near neighbourhood of one to whose magnetic influence she had once been so strangely subjected? I left Margrave still sleeping, closed and locked the door of the hut, went back to my dwelling, and met Amy at the threshold. Her smile was so cheering that I felt at once relieved.

"Hush!" said the child, putting her finger to her lips, "she is so quiet! I was coming in search of you, with a message from her."

"From Lillian to me—what! to me?"

"Hush! About an hour ago, she beckoned me to draw near to her, and then said, very softly, 'Tell Allen, that light is coming back to me, and it all settles on him—on him. Tell him that I pray to be spared to walk by his side on earth, hand-in-hand to that heaven which is no dream, Amy. Tell him that;—no dream.'"

While the child spoke my tears gushed, and the strong hands in which I veiled my face quivered like the leaf of the aspen. And when I could command my voice, I said, plaintively,

"May I not, then, see her?—only for a mo-

ment, and answer her message, though but by a look?"

"No, no!"

"No! Where is Faber?"

"Gone into the forest, in search of some herbs, but he gave me this note for you."

I wiped the blinding tears from my eyes, and read these lines:

"I have, though with hesitation, permitted Amy to tell you the cheering words, by which our beloved patient confirms my belief that reason is coming back to her—slowly, labouringly, but, if she survive, for permanent restoration. On no account, attempt to precipitate or disturb the work of Nature. As dangerous as a sudden glare of light to eyes long blind and newly regaining vision, in the friendly and soothing dark,—would be the agitation that your presence at this crisis would cause. Confide in me."

I remained brooding over these lines and over Lillian's message, long and silently, while Amy's soothing whispers stole into my ear, soft as the murmurs of a rill heard in the gloom of forests. Rousing myself at length, my thoughts returned to Margrave. Doubtless he would soon awake. I bade Amy bring me such slight nutriment as I thought best suited to his enfeebled state, telling her it was for a sick traveller, resting himself in my hut. When Amy returned, I took from her the little basket with which she was charged, and having, meanwhile, made a careful selection from the contents of my medicine-chest, went back to the hut. I had not long resumed my place beside Margrave's pillow before he awoke.

"What o'clock is it?" he asked, with an anxious voice.

"About seven."

"Not later? That is well; my time is precious."

"Compose yourself, and eat."

I placed the food before him, and he partook of it, though sparingly, and as if with effort. He then dozed for a short time, again woke up, and impatiently demanded the cordial, which I had prepared in the mean while. Its effect was greater and more immediate than I could have anticipated, proving, perhaps, how much of youth there was still left in his system, however undermined and ravaged by disease. Colour came back to his cheek, his voice grew perceptibly stronger. And as I lighted the lamp on the table near us—for it was growing dark—he gathered himself up, and spoke thus:

"You remember that I once pressed on you certain experiments. My object then was to discover the materials from which is extracted the specific that enables the organs of life to expel disease and regain vigour. In that hope I sought your intimacy. An intimacy you gave, but withdrew."

"Dare you complain? Who and what was the being from whose intimacy I shrunk appalled?"

"Ask what questions you please," cried Margrave, impatiently, "later,—if I have strength

left to answer them. But do not interrupt me, while I husband my force to say what alone is important to me and to you. Disappointed in the hopes I had placed in you, I resolved to repair to Paris,—that great furnace of all bold ideas. I questioned learned formalists; I listened to audacious empirics. The first, with all their boasted knowledge, were too timid to concede my premises; the second, with all their speculative daring, too knavish to let me trust to their conclusions. I found but one man, a Sicilian, who comprehended the secrets that are called occult, and had the courage to meet Nature and all her agencies face to face. He believed, and sincerely, that he was approaching the grand result, at the very moment when he perished from want of the common precautions which a tyro in chemistry would have taken. At his death the gaudy city became hateful; all its pretended pleasures only served to exhaust life the faster. The true joys of youth are those of the wild bird and wild brute, in the healthful enjoyment of Nature. In cities, youth is but old age with a varnish. I fled to the East; I passed through the tents of the Arabs; I was guided—no matter by whom or by what—to the house of a Dervish, who had had for his teacher the most erudite master of secrets occult, whom I knew years ago at Aleppo—why that exclamation?"

"Proceed. What I have to say will come—later."

"From this Dervish I half forced and half purchased the secret I sought to obtain. I now know from what peculiar substance the so-called elixir of life is extracted; I know also the steps of the process through which that task is accomplished. You smile incredulously? What is your doubt? State it while I rest for a moment. My breath labours; give me more of the cordial."

"Need I tell you my doubt? You have, you say, at your command the elixir of life of which Cagliostro did not leave his disciples the recipe; and you stretch out your hand for a vulgar cordial which any village chemist could give you!"

"I can explain this apparent contradiction. The process by which the elixir is extracted from the material which hoards its essence, is one that requires a hardihood of courage which few possess. This Dervish, who had passed through that process once, was deaf to all prayer, and unmoved by all bribes, to attempt it again. He was poor, for the secret by which metals may be transmuted, is not, as the old alchemists seem to imply, identical with that by which the elixir of life is extracted. He had only been enabled to discover, in the niggard strata of the lands within range of his travel, a few scanty morsels of the glorious substance. From these he had extracted scarcely enough of the elixir to fill a third of that little glass which I have just drained. He guarded every drop for himself. Who that holds healthful life as the one boon above all price to the living, would waste upon others what prolongs and recruits his own

being? Therefore, though he sold me his secret, he would not sell me his treasure."

"Any quack may sell you the information how to make not only an elixir, but a sun and a moon, and then scare you from the experiment by tales of the danger of trying it! How do you know that this essence which the Dervish possessed was the elixir of life, since it seems you have not tried on yourself what effect its precious drops could produce? Poor wretch! who once seemed to me so awfully potent, do you come to the Antipodes in search of a drug that only exists in the fables by which a child is amused?"

"The elixir of life is no fable," cried Margrave, with a kindling of eye, a power of voice, a dilation of form, that startled me in one just before so feeble. "That elixir was bright in my veins when we last met. From that golden draught of the life-spring of joy I took all that can gladden creation. What sage would not have exchanged his wearisome knowledge for my lusty revels with Nature? What monarch would not have bartered his crown, with its brain-ache of care, for the radiance that circled my brows, flashing out from the light that was in me? Oh again, oh again, to enjoy the freedom of air with the bird, and the glow of the sun with the lizard; to sport through the blooms of the earth, Nature's playmate and darling; to face, in the forest and desert, the pard and the lion,—Nature's bravest and fiercest,—her first-born, the heir of her realm, with the rest of her children for slaves!"

As these words burst from his lips, there was a wild grandeur in the aspect of this enigmatical being which I had never beheld in the former time of his affluent dazzling youth. And, indeed, in his language, and in the thoughts it clothed, there was an earnestness, a concentration, a directness, a purpose, which had seemed wanting to his desultory talk in the earlier days. I expected that reaction of languor and exhaustion would follow his vehement outbreak of passion; but, after a short pause, he went on with steady accents. His will was sustaining his strength. He was determined to force his convictions on me, and the vitality, once so rich, rallied all its lingering forces to the aid of his intense desire.

"I tell you, then," he resumed, with deliberate calmness, "that, years ago, I tested in my own person that essence which is the sovereign medicament. In me, as you saw me at L—, you beheld the proof of its virtues. Feeble and ill as I am now, my state was incalculably more hopeless when formerly restored by the elixir. He, from whom I then took the sublime restorative, died without revealing the secret of its composition. What I obtained was only just sufficient to recruit the lamp of my life, then dying down—and no drop was left for renewing the light which wastes its own rays in the air that it gilds. Though the Dervish would not sell me his treasure, he permitted me to see it. The appearance and odour of this essence are strangely peculiar—unmistakable by one who has once beheld and partaken of it.

In short, I recognised in the hands of the Dervish the bright life-renewer, as I had borne it away from the corpse of the Sage of Aleppo."

"Hold! Are you then, in truth, the murderer of Haroun, and is your true name Louis Grayle?"

"I am no murderer, and Louis Grayle did not leave me his name. I again adjure you to postpone for this night, at least, the questions you wish to address to me.

"Seeing that this obstinate pauper possessed that, for which the pale owners of millions, at the first touch of palsy or gout, would consent to be paupers, of course I coveted the possession of the essence even more than the knowledge of the substance from which it is extracted. I had no coward fear of the experiment, which this timid driveller had not the nerve to renew. But still the experiment might fail. I must traverse land and sea to find the fit place for it. While in the rags of the Dervish, the unfailing result of the experiment was at hand. The Dervish suspected my design—he dreaded my power. He fled on the very night in which I had meant to seize what he refused to sell me. After all, I should have done him no great wrong; for I should have left him wealth enough to transport himself to any soil in which the material for the elixir may be most abundant, and the desire of life would have given his shrinking nerves the courage to replenish its ravished store. I had Arabs in my pay, who obeyed me as hounds their master. I chased the fugitive. I came on his track, reached a house in a miserable village, in which, I was told, he had entered but an hour before. The day was declining: the light in the room imperfect. I saw in a corner what seemed to me the form of the Dervish—stooped to seize it, and my hand closed on an asp. The artful Dervish had so piled his rags that they took the shape of the form they had clothed, and he had left, as a substitute for the giver of life, the venomous reptile of death.

"The strength of my system enabled me to survive the effect of the poison; but during the torpor that numbed me, my Arabs, alarmed, gave no chase to my quarry. At last, though enfeebled and languid, I was again on my horse;—again the pursuit—again the track! I learned—but this time by a knowledge surer than man's—that the Dervish had taken his refuge in a hamlet that had sprung up over the site of a city once famed through Assyria. The same voice that informed me of his whereabouts, warned me not to pursue. I rejected the warning. In my eager impatience I sprang on to the chase; in my fearless resolve I felt sure of the prey. I arrived at the hamlet, wearied out, for my forces were no longer the same since the bite of the asp. The Dervish eluded me still; he had left the floors, on which I sank exhausted, but a few minutes before my horse stopped at the door. The carpet, on which he had rested, still lay on the ground. I dismissed the youngest and keenest of my troop in search of the fugitive. Sure that this time he would not escape, my eyes closed in sleep.

"How long I slept I know not—a long dream of solitude, fever, and anguish. Was it the curse of the Dervish's carpet? Was it a taint in the walls of the house, or of the air, which broods sickly and rank over places where cities lie buried? I know not; but the Pest of the East had seized me in slumber. When my senses recovered I found myself alone, plundered of my arms, despoiled of such gold as I had carried about me. All had deserted and left me, as the living leave the dead whom the Plague has claimed for its own. As soon as I could stand I crawled from the threshold. The moment my voice was heard, my face seen, the whole squalid populace rose as on a wild beast—a mad dog. I was driven from the place with imprecations and stones, as a miscreant whom the Plague had overtaken, while plotting the death of a holy man. Bruised and bleeding, but still defying, I turned in wrath on that dastardly rabble; they slunk away from my path. I knew the land for miles around. I had been in that land years, long years, ago. I came at last to the road which the caravans take on their way to Damascus. There I was found, speechless and seemingly lifeless, by some European travellers. Conveyed to Damascus, I languished for weeks, between life and death. But for the virtue of that essence, which lingered yet in my veins, I could not have survived—even thus feeble and shattered. I need not say that I now abandoned all thought of discovering the Dervish. I had at least his secret, if I had failed of the paltry supply he had drawn from its uses. Such appliances as he had told me were needful, are procured in the East with more ease than in Europe. To sum up, I am here—instructed in all the knowledge, and supplied with all the aids, which warrant me in saying, 'Do you care for new life in its richest enjoyments, if not for yourself, for one whom you love, and would relieve from the grave?' Then, share with me in a task that a single night will accomplish, and ravish a prize by which the life that you value the most will be saved from the dust and the worm, to live on, ever young, ever blooming, while each infant—new-born while I speak—shall have passed to the grave. Nay, where is the limit to life, while the earth hides the substance by which life is renewed?"

I give as faithfully as I can recollect the words in which Margrave addressed me. But who can guess by cold words transcribed, even were they artfully ranged by a master of languages, the effect words produce when warm from the breath of the speaker? Ask one of an audience which some orator held enthralled why his words do not quicken a beat in the reader's pulse, and the answer of one who had listened will be, "The words took their charm from the voice and the eye, the aspect, the manner, the man!" So it was with the incomprehensible being before me. Though his youth was faded, though his beauty was dimmed, though my fancies clothed him with memories of abhorrent dread, though my reason opposed his audacious

beliefs and assumptions, still he charmed and spell-bound me; still he was the mystical Fascinator; still, if the legends of magic had truth for their basis, he was the *born magician*; as genius, in what calling soever, is born with the gift to enchant and subdue us.

Constraining myself to answer calmly, I said, "You have told me your story; you have defined the object of the experiment in which you ask me to aid. You do right to bid me postpone my replies or my questions. Seek to recruit by sleep the strength you have so sorely tasked. To-morrow—"

"To-morrow, ere night, you will decide whether the man whom out of all earth I have selected to aid me, shall be the foe to condemn me to perish! I tell you plainly I need your aid, and your prompt aid. Three days from this, and all aid will be too late!"

I had already gained the door of the room, when he called to me to come back.

"You do not live in this hut, but with your family yonder. Do not tell them that I am here; let no one but yourself see me as I now am. Lock the door of the hut when you quit it. I should not close my eyes if I were not secure from intruders."

"There is but one in my house, or in these parts, whom I would except from the interdict you impose. You are aware of your own imminent danger; the life, which you believe the discovery of a Dervish will indefinitely prolong, seems to my eye of physician to hang on a thread. I have already formed my own conjecture as to the nature of the disease that enfeebles you. But I would fain compare that conjecture with the weightier opinion of one whose experience and skill are superior to mine. Permit me, then, when I return to you to-morrow, to bring with me the great physician to whom I refer. His name will not, perhaps, be unknown to you. I speak of Julius Faber."

"A physician of the schools! I can guess well enough how learnedly he would prate, and how little he could do. But I will not object to his visit, if it satisfies you that, since I should die under the hands of the doctors, I may be permitted to indulge my own whim in placing my hopes in a Dervish. Yet stay. You have, doubtless, spoken of me to this Julius Faber, your fellow-physician and friend? Promise me, if you bring him here, that you will not name me, that you will not repeat to him the tale I have told you, or the hope which has led me to these shores. What I have told to you, no matter whether, at this moment, you consider me the dupe of a chimera, is still under the seal of the confidence which a patient reposes in the physician he himself selects for his confidant. I select you, and not Julius Faber!"

"Be it as you will," said I, after a moment's reflection. "The moment you make yourself my patient I am bound to consider what is best for you. And you may more respect, and profit by, an opinion based upon your purely physical condition than by one in which you might suppose

the advice was directed rather to the disease of the mind than to that of the body."

"How amazed and indignant your brother physician will be if he ever see me a second time! How learnedly he will prove that, according to all correct principles of science and nature, I ought to be dead!"

He uttered this jest with a faint dreary echo of his old merry, melodious laugh, then turned his face to the wall; and so I left him to repose.

TWO CURES FOR A PINCH.

THE pinch of poverty upon the country labourer is often very sharp. In an ideal way he is a privileged man, whose daily labour meets his daily wants, and who for his daily earning is so manifestly dependent on the Giver of health that his religion (when he has any) is, of all things, practical. He can apply the simple principles of his faith to all his labour, and, free from the complexities of business life, find consolation and encouragement where cleverer men in their webs of scheme or speculation sometimes fail to obtain either. When he cannot earn, he is fed by his richer brethren, and may have, therefore, good will to man as well as trust in God. But the man on whom he should depend most, even in the day of sickness and want, may perhaps be himself.

Under the pinch of his poverty, succour may come to the farm-labourer in the shape of relief from the poor-rate, which is one form of the before-named ideal bliss: or from the fruits of his own foresight, when it has been possible for him to lay up provision in a savings bank or a friendly society. The poor-rate dates from the reign of Elizabeth. Development of the friendly societies and savings banks for the poor, belongs almost wholly to the reign of Victoria. But the elder form of provision against the evil day has had the constant and unvarying countenance of the legislature, while the younger has struggled with many difficulties interposed by law.

Savings banks, now encouraged, are only beginning to assume a form that brings them within the reach of the agricultural poor; yet the rural provident institutions represent two millions a year spent in self-help. Parish relief was the austere friend of the sick and destitute. It gave bare life without a smile or a word of encouragement, to thousands who, but for its interference, must have perished miserably. The official system, when substantially improved in character, grew to be even more forbidding in its aspect. Re-arrangements, modifications and improvements introduced by the Poor Law Board, have continued, on the whole, in a better way, all the benefits in the power of the poor-rate at a cost reduced by one-fifth. But this is a very rough cure for the pinch of want. The law awards scanty allowance to the destitute infirm, who prefer the shelter of their own low roofs to the better provision in the "House." In that House, also, husband and wife, if able-bodied, parent and child, are alike separated, the one from the other. At this day an old woman

is in jail for having, by cruel usage, slain in the workhouse a child of three years old; the mother, who was in the same workhouse, being condemned as refractory by the authorities for clamouring to come at, and be the helper of, her child. Not long ago, a mother and her little one being received in a workhouse, the mother pleaded for leave to be the child's nurse, because it was very troublesome, and nobody but she was likely to be patient with it. This law of God being against poor-law system, the mother and child were parted, and the child was given to a workhouse nurse—by whose cruelty it was killed for its provocations of her temper.

Again, provident habits, we are told, should be encouraged. Poor-rate relief joins issue with this principle. The labourer who shall have saved a small sum, or who occupies a couple of roods of land, when past work by illness or decrepitude of age, must first spend all to the last farthing, and give up his little tenancy, before he can be eligible for a relief given in far less degree to the respectable distressed poor than to the idle destitute and sick.

Surely some harm comes of the tramping upon conjugal and parental feelings, the weakening of that desire for self-support which is one of the best stimulants of industry, the substitution for that feeling of interdependence which should exist between rich and poor, of habits of dependence by the poor upon the rich. If they are out of work, whether from some casualty (and it is singular how many casualties befall the idle) or from misconduct, the improvident poor know where to turn for relief, and how to make the best bargain with the officer or the board. This ready resource makes them feel independent of the world. They therefore contract marriage without taking thought how to maintain a wife, and this, too, at an age when few of the other labouring or professional classes can afford to marry. Old age, on the other hand, needs no provision, for there are the gentry, the charities, the clergymen; and the poor-law, which protects them against absolute starvation, will even defray the cost of the pauper's burial. Does the employer urge his labourer to put aside, while he is young and hearty, a yearly trifle to provide for days of age or illness? Does the clergyman lecture copiously in the schoolroom on the benefits of the Post-office Savings Bank just opened in the village, or the Co-operative Society afloat in the next town, or the County Benefit Club? Too commonly the reply to his persuasions is, "Why should I toil for the future? Why lay by money for an annuity when I come to be seventy? To save the rate? To help the parson and the squire? The law compels them to support me when I can't support myself. They live by the sweat of our brow, and when our turn comes, support us they shall." With such reasoning, many are satisfied; they act upon it, and frame their plans in life (so far as they frame any) in accordance with it. The degradation of pauperism is a moral degradation, and with such characters weighs literally nothing.

On the other hand, the true-hearted industrious farm-labourer, who feels as great a natural craving for independence as any of his fellow-countrymen, regards for a while, with a feeling akin to shame, the prospect of pauper relief. To secure provision against days of failing strength, he would toil manfully, but, alas! to the ancient difficulty of earning bread enough by his own toil, is added the demand that he shall earn not less than a competence. Blessed with health, and in constant work at good wages, with a prudent housewife's help, say that he succeeds in rising above possible need of help from the rate: it is well. But if, with interrupted health, or fewer opportunities, or greater pulls upon his means, his success fall only a little short of securing him perfect independence, how is it with him then? The savings of years must vanish altogether before he can be, from the very nature of the poor-law, eligible for relief. To this argument he is then tempted: "A provision, at least as respectable as that which most of my neighbours require is in store for me, on condition that I am eligible to claim it. Why debar myself, my wife and family, from many present comforts on the mere chance of securing independence?" Government security for his little savings, and two and a half per cent per annum in addition, appears to him a mere snare and delusion. It is a hundred to one that his savings will be no real gain to himself, when they constitute him independent in the eye of the poor-law,—though God knows how urgent may be his necessities! The poor-rate is a burden not laid upon him by law: why should he, by saving money, make of it a rod for his own back? He therefore relinquishes all notion of an annuity against old age, and confines the use of his savings to another end. He will strive, notwithstanding grave impediments, to secure provision for the day of sickness.

Such is the influence exerted over our peasantry by the system of poor-rate relief. It does not tend to eradicate the improvidence of the idle, but directly to encourage it. On the other hand, it does discourage the exertions of the industrious poor, when they would strive for an honourable rest to end their lives of toil.

And further; can it be maintained that the present system of pauper relief is a whit more successful in strengthening the bonds of sympathy and good feeling which ought to exist between those who pay, and those who receive the rate? Is the ratepayer induced by the process of a continuous and heavy drain on his income, to regard with a more friendly eye the classes for whose benefit he is so large an involuntary subscriber? Is the pauper grateful who receives the miserable dole? Is not this the result of it: That the line of demarcation between rich and poor, instead of being softened down so as to become imperceptible, becomes more and more strongly defined? How heavily such a result bears upon the moral and social condition of the poor, I say nothing here of the

rich, let those bear testimony who have constantly, from the nature of their occupation, the unhappiness to witness it. The evil influences which are here pointed out are seldom to be charged on the administration of the poor-law. Perhaps no system is more zealously worked by its well-paid, its ill-paid, and its unpaid staff. The defect is one of principle.

Compare the work done by the small farmer nearest to the labourer in station, with that of the farm-labourer himself. The farmer works from early morning until night, and often for some hours into the night. Sunday is not an idle day with him; he may begin an hour or so later on that morning, but his stable must be cleaned, his cows must be milked, and all the ordinary and daily routine performed, that is indispensable to the care and nourishment of animal life. He nevertheless "gets round," as he calls it, by church-time, where he generally attends morning service with his wife and some members of his family, all neatly and substantially clothed. In the evening he has his duties to attend to, after which there is a little leisure for him. Next morning, his lantern may be seen twinkling in his cow-shed long before the dawn. He is at work all day, and, except the time required for market, and an occasional visit at the public-house to hear the news, he works early and late throughout the whole week. His little stock is a cause of constant anxiety to him. The sheep on the distant moor must be daily visited; his foal, it is ten chances to one, will injure itself before it is fit for breaking in; his cows, and calves, and pigs, are at least as subject to the prevalent epidemic diseases, and to the mishaps incidental to stock, as those of his landlord. What, then, is his scale of remuneration? "Something large, doubtless," the amateur farmer of four acres replies—"sufficient to secure him comfortable independence." Would that it were so! We have known cases in which the loss of a cow by disease, the accident in the fold, badness of seed or season, has so crippled the industrious small farmer, that years of self-denying toil were necessary before the little loss could be replaced. To the labourer (unless he be shepherd or wagoner, when higher wages are paid), the whole of Sunday is a holiday. On week days in summer, his work is very little, if at all, in excess of ten hours' out-door labour; his great hardship comes through a poor-law, mercifully modified by the Irremovable Poor Act of last session, which, by its operation on ratepayers, forces him often to reside far from his place of work, and adds a useless six or eight miles' walk to a day's bodily exertion. In winter, he works during daylight. In this regular time for labour, free from care of its own too, he earns a day's wages: certain though sometimes too small. The little farmer pays his way as well as he can, pays his rates, undertakes the duties which devolve upon him as a resident of his parish, and never parades his losses, unless when he pays his tithe. Then he does it constitutionally and periodically. But the other often considers himself an ill-used hard-worked indi-

vidual, whose best friend is pauper relief; casual now, permanent hereafter.

And yet, in many cases, independence is within his power. As the world goes, what can he do? The notion of a co-operative society has not yet reached the agricultural poor. And the savings banks, much as they deserve to make their way among them, have not done so. The friendly society, however, in one form or another, solvent in a few cases, insolvent in the many, has gained a firm hold on their regard. We only take things as they are. Even with our present safe clubs, which are on the increase, the farm-labourer may join a society which, in his illness or at his death, will secure the benefit it professes to secure, and thus place him (except when under special distress) above the want of relief as a pauper.

The actual state of the friendly society common among the rural poor, will require particular notice.

A little benefit club is to be found in almost every parish where there are fifty or sixty labourers. It is seldom solvent, even when certified by the registrar; but this consideration has never been found to prevent its receiving fresh members, and being able to keep larger and better societies almost entirely out of the field. It will be borne in mind that the benefit club is the poor man's adaptation of the principles of life and sickness assurance, to his own particular requirements. It is the refuge in times of distress, built by the person destined to fly to it, and deserves commendation for the ingenious contrivances resorted to in its construction, even where it is unsound. Diverted by the conditions of poor-rate relief from the necessity of saving money, the farm-labourer joins the sharing-out club, which is to be his part provision for a time of sickness. The club-meetings are usually held at the public-house, and affairs are principally managed by the landlord; sometimes, says Mr. Tidd Pratt, "the club is sold with the good will of the house." These friendly or benefit societies demand particular attention; they are contrived to secure the advantages of the provident society without abandoning the claim on the poor-rate.

The Brummagem Clubs (we guess this to be Mr. Tidd Pratt's meaning, when he speaks of "Birmingham Societies") are paid for on the principle "that a halfpenny a week from each member will secure one shilling a week to a sick member for a term of months: with a reduced allowance subsequently, called half-pay."

Every member pays alike. There are usually two or three middle-aged men who, it is alleged, give the younger men the benefit of their experience. They are, to some extent, associated with the landlord in the management of such a club.

Every member joining is obliged to declare, to the best of his knowledge, whether he has any disease or ailment of a kind likely to throw him on the club. This is a verbal declaration, and, if subsequent events prove it to be false, the member is excluded and forfeits all benefit

in the club, together with the money he has paid. This expedient, which in a small society is good, saves the demand of a medical certificate on joining. In some clubs, however, the practice is different, and a certificate is required: for which the usual charge is a shilling.

Objection is persistently taken to the uniform weekly contribution, on the ground that it causes the insolvency of the club. That it is unjust for a man of forty-five to pay the same contribution as a man of half the age, is a matter of fact on which not a word need be said. But that the custom causes insolvency, is a statement much too readily adopted. So far from being one of the causes of insolvency (which are in truth numerous enough without any needless addition), it will be generally found conducive to the club's prosperity. For, if we take the average age of the members at commencement, ascertain the uniform contribution, and compare it with established tables, we find at once whether it be insufficient. The average age of the members of a society at commencement, quoted by the Registrar, is thirty-one years. On the same authority we learn that a weekly allowance of ten shillings in sickness is given on conditions to males engaged in heavy labour, ceasing at various ages. Taking the highest, seventy years of age, this sum can be insured by a monthly contribution of one shilling and fivepence-halfpenny, or, omitting an inconsiderable fraction, fourpence a week.

But by the rule already stated, the amount which would be paid in a "Brummagem" club, would be fivepence a week. Of the average age of persons on joining the Brummagem clubs we have no returns, and are therefore compelled to restrict ourselves to facts within our own experience, and such information as we could ourselves collect. This, it would appear that the average age of members on the formation of a club is considerably below that quoted by Mr. Tidd Pratt. And when the club has once been set agoing, the recruits are generally on the younger side of twenty. The unfairness of the uniform rate of contribution in the Brummagem society, exists, but not to the glaring extent usually supposed. There is no great injustice in equal payments by persons in early manhood, whose ages are within the range of seven or eight years of each other. And after all, what is the security that the subscriber in such case gets for his contribution? In law, none at all. He cannot recover damages from a club whose rules are not legalised. Even in custom, there is no security worth naming. Let us take the rules and regulations of the Benevolent Society, held at the Blank's Head in the county of Dashi. A threefold object is secured by the society; 1. The provision for sickness and burial; 2. The promotion of social intercourse and neighbourly good feeling; 3. The interest of the house where the meetings are held.

1. The first feature in the club is the term of its existence. This is annual. This Phoenix of the taproom undergoes the pangs of dissolution

on the first Monday in May, to rise from its tobacco-ashes with new plumage ready for another plucking. On that auspicious day it receives new blood, and the fact is not to be disguised or suppressed, that it not unfrequently avails itself of the opportunity of ridding itself of a member or so who threatens to be burdensome. Here is a security against insolvency at the expense only of good faith. But this proceeding is so managed that it is done by the unanimous consent of the members. They do not anticipate that infirmities and increasing years may bring themselves into a similar position to that which they rid their hands of.

The second article shows that in point of fact, twelve months' pay is given for eleven months' security against the needs of sickness. Including with the regular yearly expenses, the average cost of additional levies on the death of a member's wife or child, the annual payment of each member to the club is about sixpence a week, or one pound six shillings a year: irrespective of the cost of dinners, drink, banners, insignia, ringers, clerks, and sermons. The full pay in sickness is eight shillings per week for three months, minus the weekly premium of fourpence. If the sick member be at that time on the club, he is reduced to half-pay, which, less the weekly premium, is three and eightpence. This he is entitled to claim for three months more. If at the end of this second term he be still on the sick list, he is superannuated on two shillings a week: which after deduction of the regular contribution is twentypence: subject to the doubt whether the superannuated member may not outlive his club, or whether he can escape the annual disposition to clear off encumbrances on the first Monday in May.

The sick member's liberty is also curiously fettered by conditions in the form of rude guarantees of bona fide sickness, and due care to restore health: "No member receiving benefit from the club," says one of the rules before us, "shall be allowed to walk more than three miles from home without being fined one shilling; if found drunk, to be fined one shilling; if found working or assisting in anything of the kind; or if he be out after seven o'clock in the evening, he shall be fined or excluded, as the majority think proper."

In practice the sick member is sooner or later compelled to seek pauper relief, which the club is far from securing him against the degradation of receiving. The change from twentypence to half-a-crown, is too obvious an advantage to be lost sight of. The end is expressed in the words of a sick and miserable object, who begged hard for a little more than five shillings a week for breaking stones on the road in his old age. When he was asked about his club, "they sent me," he replied, "my dinner and a couple of shillings on the club-day, and said they would have no more to do with me. I must go to the parish; that would do better for me than they could, and was better able to pay than they were." The poor-rate, in fact, is the real superannuation fund of such societies.

If a member dies, the club makes great capital of his funeral. The amount subscribed for the funeral depends on the number of members. Notwithstanding that enough is obtained to defray the expenses, the family will often apply to the relieving officer for the ordinary cost of a pauper funeral, varying from a pound to five-and-twenty shillings, which is not always refused. The club, especially if the deceased were popular, attends the burial, and brings honour to itself by the decent regard it shows for such last offices.

There is one redeeming feature of the Brummagem club—its promotion of social and neighbourly good will. It seizes on the popular love of a holiday, and turns it to account. On the first Monday in May, there is the procession to the village church, where the sermon is duly preached, for which the rector is invited to dinner. His fee is offered him, which he is, of course, expected to return. With the "parson's sermon and company," the society in the eyes of the peasantry receives the approval of the Church—no slight help to the club. After dinner, come beer, tobacco, music, and dancing.

There is, perhaps, nothing more wearisome to the poor than our model gatherings, at which a lecture to folks who want unrestrained freedom, is substituted for the mirth and excitement of the club-day afternoon. Many friends of the poor appear to be afraid of trusting them with their wives and children at a holiday gathering, unless they can themselves be present to regulate the proceedings. But if we would expect real moral improvement and social mirth not degraded by brutal amusements, we must look elsewhere for aid to get them than to the impertinence of middle or upper class supervision. That Gospel, which was given with special reference to the poor, contains the best means of success. This may and can be brought to bear on the rural poor, with results as beneficial to them as it has proved to the upper classes within the compass of a century, and with the accumulated force with which the good example of the rich cannot fail to influence the poor. The "higher orders" will contribute to the successful issue of the struggle for the social and moral elevation of the poor, in proportion as their example carries weight with it. But the work cannot be done by interfering with their holidays, and attempting to secure among the poor good order by the presence of the rich.

The Brummagem club has another peculiarity on which we need not long dwell. It is the best friend of the alehouse. An examination of the rules and articles above cited will show how especially adapted to create and keep together his "connexion" a society of this kind is to the publican. The clasp of the "Black Bear" and the insidious grip of the "Green Man," prove alike fatal to the farm labourer. From these, he can be best guarded by the means already indicated. The brewers need not be apprehensive that the withdrawal of such clubs from their houses would lessen the demand for beer. The independence and bettered condition

of the peasant, would not debar him from the enjoyment of many blessings: and good beer is a blessing to a hard-working man, let who will say that it is not. At the same time there exists no reason, so far as we know, why club accounts should not be audited in the public-house, which is a house open for public use and business as well as for pleasure. But there is excellent reason why the landlord should not be suffered to meddle with the conduct of the club.

Very many members of Brummagem clubs are men as intelligent and respectable as can be found in any class of life; but the influences to retain them in such insecure refuges, are too powerful to be counteracted by any known available means. The attractions are too great, the power is too firmly rooted, for institutions which would raise the peasantry in the social scale to drive them out of the field. Such is the disastrous action of the poor-law relief on the friendly society. We have the misshapen machinery of Brummagem contrivance, so ingeniously adapted to the lowest requirements of the poor, that it withholds its aid at the moment when the member can make good his claim for help from his parish, and resigns him either to half-a-crown a week out-door relief, or (if he has no home and is crippled and broken down) leaves him to spend the remainder of his days in the district union. Yet from the help of legalised provident societies, in time of sickness or age, may be obtained to an amount larger than poor-rate allowance, or than the sharing out club-pay.

A man of average health engaged in heavy labour, aged thirty-one years (and this is much higher than the average age of the rural poor in joining clubs), may secure (1) a sick allowance of ten shillings a week up to sixty-five years, the contribution and benefit then to cease; (2) an annuity of a pound a month, commencing at the age of sixty-five and payable until death: money returnable in case of death before sixty-five; and (3) a sum of five pounds at death; for the following payments. For (1) the sick pay, one shilling and threepence-halfpenny a month, which is between threepence and fourpence a week; for (2) the annuity, two and ninepence a month, which is between sevenpence and eightpence a week; and for (3) the five pounds at death, twopence-halfpenny a month. If four shillings a year be added for medical attendance, the subscriber will be found to pay in round numbers for the whole of these advantages, one shilling and one penny a week.

They who are conversant with the trials of the rural poor, know the difficulty with which in times of pressure the farm labourer would pay one shilling and a penny out of his weekly earnings. The struggle is particularly heavy: not at the outset, nor usually after fifteen or sixteen years of married life, but when there are half a dozen young children depending on a man's work for bread and clothes and shoes—when employment is uncertain, and not one of the family is able to earn fourpence a day as scarecrow on a farm. But as a general rule, our

poor can save the amount if they will try. It is, as they need not be told, a less sum than such a club as that above described usually costs them.

It is the opinion of persons conversant with the present aspect of provident societies, that the industrial classes will in process of time work out their own social and moral regeneration without help from the legislature. Exception, however, must be taken to the classes who look to the poor-rate for relief. Their social improvement is, indeed, a work to be done by themselves, and one which cannot be done for them. Still they may be assisted in it by removal of those barriers which now stand in the path of progress. Let it be remembered that provident institutions furnish a maintenance for those who will take the trouble to secure it. That this maintenance can be obtained and secured without separating man and wife from each other, or parents from children; that this maintenance (unless in certain cases) leaves inviolate the sacred home. And provident institutions, as experience abundantly shows, unite the sympathies of rich and poor for each other. They provide a common ground of meeting—a common interest. Prejudices are removed, and the bonds of sympathy and kindness are strengthened, between all classes, without the least risk of injury to the self-respect of any. And such societies also discourage improvidence and idleness, which are the handmaids of poor-rate relief, and tend to substitute those habits which lead to manliness and independence. However strange a truth it may seem, it is true in very many cases, that independence is within reach of our agricultural labourers. But provident habits are discouraged by the working of the poor-law. We do not, of course, for a moment doubt the necessity of a poor-law administration. Assistance will always be required for casual poor and for the numerous classes which no provident society can help. To these the need by thousands of the special benefit of medical care are to be added, and the distresses which no human foresight can avert.

By the Small Tenements Act, the cottager's rates are paid by the landlord. Rent is rent to the labourer, and he knows and cares nothing about rates and taxes. But if every cottager were liable to payment of a proportionate share of the rate whenever one was levied, he would have the same interest in keeping it within reasonable limits as his landlord has. And the labourer would know better than the landlord which of his neighbours to rouse out of real indolence and thriftlessness. The public feeling of their own class would thus act upon the idle. In the next place, the injustice of compelling the object of relief to make himself a beggar before he can justify his claim on the rate, is monstrous. How numberless are cases of distress in the upper classes, where the sufferer has some small income! If the income be inadequate to relieve the distress, the case is admitted, and the help of friends obtained. Such a friend we think

the poor-law ought to be and might be to the poor, though an essential change is requisite to make it so. Particular times of pressure on the industrious poor might also be met on a wiser system than the present, by some well-timed help out of the rate.

But to make provident societies what they should be, and what we believe they will one day become, there is need, probably, of a central board constituted by parliament. The friendly society would not then be subjected, as it has been of late years, to the caprices of legislation: which according to the influences of the passing hour has attempted to prevent it from entering the field with the large assurance societies. Between oppression on the one hand, and prejudice and ignorance on the other, these provident institutions have had to fight against much more than their fair share of difficulties. But if their development should be found sensibly to diminish the burden of the poor-rate, would not the employers of farm labourers have an additional reason to accord cheerful help to their men as fit occasion offered?

A RATHER REMARKABLE PERSON.

I HAPPENED to be at a well-known coast town in South Wales last April, at the time when the census had to be taken, and knowing the Chief Registrar of the district, I offered to become a volunteer enumerator. I had been so long idling, lounging, and making tours without having any particular object in view, that the chance of any useful occupation presented itself to me as an agreeable change. My friend very kindly gave me a choice of ground to go over, and I selected a small island—called Swamp Island—lying out in the Channel, about twenty miles from the coast, which had figured in the census tables of 1851 as possessing a population of three. As a wilderness it was only then beaten by Little Papa, one of the Shetland Islands, which held only one person—an old woman; and by Inchcolm, one of the Fife Islands, which sheltered only one man—a farm labourer. It was a pity, perhaps, that these two solitudes with their two inhabitants could not have been joined together in holy matrimony, forming one decent family on one tolerable island.

Very early on the morning appointed for my journey, I started in a large fishing-smack, the owner of which, for a small consideration, undertook to land me at my destination, and call for me again before night. I was full of curiosity as to what people, and how many, I should find on Swamp Island, but my boatmen could give me no information on this head. As there was no good fishing within several miles of the scrubby patch of sea-land to which I was bound, they had never taken the trouble even to inquire whether it was inhabited.

I landed, with some difficulty, in a not very shallow creek, and should have been soaked through above my knees if I had not been protected by a thick waterproof dress. The weather

had been rather rough during our few hours' voyage from the mainland—much rougher than I expected—and as I am no better sailor than nine-tenths of the human race, I felt a little qualmy. My companions immediately put off again to fish, and I was soon left to make friends with a few seagulls.

Having comforted myself with a little brandy and biscuit that I carried with me, I struggled up through the reeds, stones, and long grass, and prepared to begin my work. I got upon a hillock, and took a survey of the island through a telescope. The prospect was not encouraging. As far as I could see, there was nothing but a dead level of swampy earth and grass, broken here and there with small hillocks, like the one on which I stood. The island was stated by geographical authorities to be about ten miles long, and twelve broad, but the inequalities of the ground would not allow my telescope to range over a third of this space. As there was no house or hut in sight, nor any sign of a human being, I was compelled to walk on in the discharge of my duty. I strode along in the direction of the rising ground in front, now plunging into a hole, now stumbling over grass-covered blocks of stone, and blessing the practical genius who invented roads. One mile of walking on Swamp Island was equal to four miles on the mainland.

In about two hours I reached the distant ridge, and still found no traces of inhabitants. I was rather disappointed at this, though not surprised, for I could see nothing to tempt any one to settle on such a spot. The earth was chalky, and the vegetation scanty, to say nothing of the want of society. If the three inhabitants who had figured in a former census had deserted the place, I felt that I could scarcely blame them.

I altered my course at this point, and followed the line of a shallow valley. I had not proceeded far, when I came to traces of mud, and a little farther on to a narrow channel of water. Keeping along the side of this inland stream, which I soon found to be a long tidal creek running down to the sea, I came suddenly on a large flat-bottomed boat—something between a fishing-punt and a barge—moored close to a bank on which stood a low hut, built chiefly with turf and stones. I lost no time in pushing open the half-closed door of this hut, and was met by a dense cloud of smoke which nearly choked and blinded me. It came from a fire of damp wood. When the fumes had partly blown off, I peeped through the door again, and saw an old man kneeling on the turf-floor, blowing the embers with his mouth. His dress was ragged; almost theatrical in its tatters, and his long dirty beard dragged through the ashes.

"Stand out of the draught," he said angrily, without turning round, "and don't thwart me, pampered menial!"

I thought the style and tone of this address somewhat peculiar, and I soon explained who I was, and on what errand I came.

"Census?" he said, standing up, and looking at me; "why am I hunted about in this way? I come miles beyond the land's-end, for quiet—solitude—air. I can't breathe in cities—no man can breathe in cities;—I fly to nature, and want to be left alone."

"We shall not trouble you again for ten years," I returned, amiably; "perhaps not then."

"Ten years!" he said, contemptuously,— "what's ten years—what's twenty years—to one who has lived for centuries?"

"Eh?" I answered, pricking up my ears at this, "lived for centuries?"

"Yes," he said, "I have just completed my one-hundred-and-seventy-sixth year."

"This sounds very remarkable," I replied, "and it is almost as strange to find you living in such a desert as this."

"You may think so," he said, shortly, "I don't."

"What name will you put down in this paper?" I asked, producing the official form, "and what profession?"

"Profession?" he inquired, vacantly.

"Occupation," I replied, "Calling—in fact. What are you?"

"Ha, ha!"

"That's no answer," I said, in a dignified manner.

"What am I?" he continued; "what am I not? Do you think my history can be crammed into a line, or into a thousand lines? You've asked for it, and you shall have it. Sit down and hear it."

I squatted on the turf floor in obedience to this request, which sounded like a command, and my wild-man-of-the-woods-looking host soon squatted opposite me.

"I am prepared," he began, "for any amount of doubt when I say that I never knew who my parents were; but I despise doubt, and those who feel it. I was found in a wood in a neighbourhood that it is idle to name, because it was destroyed by an earthquake more than a hundred years ago. I was discovered walking on my hands and feet, climbing trees like a squirrel, and feeding on grass and moss. The early habits thus implanted in me have never altogether left me, and this is why you find me now living contented on what you contemptuously term 'a desert.' Many ignorant people were frightened at my singular appearance, for my colour, at that time, was nearly black—"

"I beg your pardon," I said, "but what do you call your colour now?"

"No matter," he replied, "I hate to be interrupted."

"A huge dog," he continued, "was set at me, but I awaited his attack without stirring from the place, and gave him such a blow over the head with a club which I held in my hand, that the animal fell dead, and his master became respectful. After this feat I climbed a tree and took a little repose on a branch, but was allured

down by some raw meat (I am still partial to raw meat), a bucket of water, and a rabbit. I stripped off the skin of the rabbit, and devoured the flesh ravenously. I was taken in charge by a shepherd, who washed me, and found that the black colour of my skin was not natural. I was considered fair, and, on the whole, tolerably well formed, although very short; and my fingers and thumbs were uncommonly strong, which was ascribed to my practice of climbing trees. On account of my wildness I was known as the 'shepherd's beast,' and it cost a deal of trouble to render me a little tame. I was very dexterous in making holes in the walls or roofs—too dexterous, no doubt, for the comfort of my shepherd—and one day I crept through a space not larger than a rat-hole, fled once more to the woods, and became a gipsy.

"I was soon initiated into the arts and mysteries of the wandering tribe I had joined, and was foremost in all exploits for which gipsies are famous. Being wonderfully short for my age, which was considered then to be about twenty or twenty-five years, I was exhibited as a famous dwarf. My height was not more than two feet and a half, and my weight fifty-six pounds. I was remarkably agile, and could spring with ease from the ground, to a table or a mantelshef. I remember being told by a friend, who died about a century and a half ago, that I was rather of a morose temper, and extremely vain of myself, but this I can hardly believe. I was once brought into a room, to amuse the company, enclosed in an ordinary pie. I was often teased by many of the visitors, and once, I admit, I so far lost my temper as to challenge my enemy. He came to the place of meeting armed only with a squirt, and this so increased my anger that a real duel ensued, and, as I was mounted on a chair to put me on a level with my antagonist, I fired, and shot him dead.

"After this unfortunate adventure I fled from the town and my gipsy friends, and sought my fortunes in another direction. I disguised myself as a female, and went on board a large merchant vessel as a cook's attendant. I was looked upon as a mere child, a girl of all work, and so escaped much attention. I discharged my duties to the satisfaction of my employers, and passed a very pleasant though hard-working time until we came to an anchor at a port in the Mediterranean. Here one of the sailors, a second mate, became too idle to mend his own shirts, and he handed them over to me, along with a lot of stockings requiring footing, because I was the only female on board. Of course I knew nothing of needlework, and yet was afraid to confess my ignorance, for fear the deception I had practised upon the captain and owners of the ship should be discovered. I saw no way out of the difficulty except flight: so, throwing the unmended rags down the hold, I watched my opportunity, rowed on shore in a boat, and mixed with the natives of Genoa in my own proper character.

"I lived for several years very comfortably in a

number of southern cities, doing little work, because living was cheap, and the climate made it easy to sustain nature on a very small quantity of food. Whether the warmth of this part of the world acted on my system like the atmosphere of a hothouse upon plants, I never clearly understood, but I grew so rapidly in height and strength, during the five or six years of my travelling, that I soon began to excite attention as a giant.

"I was not one of those common giants, who rely upon creating wonder by their unwieldy size. I possessed many accomplishments, both intellectual and physical. As a posturer I was without a rival, and could exhibit in the most natural manner, almost every species of deformity and dislocation. I amused myself with the tailors, by sending for them to take my measure, and contriving so as to have an immoderate rising in one of my shoulders. When the clothes were brought home to be tried on, I had shifted this hump to the other shoulder, and the tailors took back the garments, apologising for their mistake. I played such tricks with the vertebrae of my back, that a celebrated surgeon, before whom I appeared as a patient, was so shocked at the sight he would not even attempt my cure.

"I was now nearly nine feet high, and I made a triumphal tour from town to town. I had gone through the whole circle of the sciences, could speak and write in ten different languages, was an accomplished rider, dancer, and singer, and a skilful performer on several musical instruments."

"Did you ever hear of a person called the 'Admirable Crichton?'" I asked, breaking into my host's narrative at this point.

"Crichton, Crichton," he answered, as if reflecting. "Was he a celebrated miser?"

"Not at all," I said; "he was a half-fabulous wonder of cleverness."

"Never heard of him in all my life," returned my host, pettishly, "and I don't see what the question has to do with my story.

"I will not weary you," he continued, "with a detailed account of my success in disputing with learned doctors, fighting with rampant gladiators, and performing many characters in an Italian play of my own writing. The narrative might possibly annoy you, by exciting envy. It is sufficient for me to tell you that I did all these things before I had reached the age of thirty. I distinguished myself in a much lower sphere by several displays of extraordinary strength, in which I pulled against two horses, lifted three hogheads of water weighing nearly two thousand pounds, rolled up a very large pewter dish with my fingers, and raised a table six feet long, with half a hundred-weight fastened to it, in my teeth. I tied a kitchen poker round my neck like a cravat, and broke a rope about two inches thick.

"About this period I began to decrease in height, and to increase very much in breadth. Some of the doctors attributed the change to the

fact that I had compressed myself in carrying an enormous weight upon my head during one of my exhibitions. Whatever was the immediate cause, I gradually grew stouter for ten years, until I weighed nearly fifty stone. My size was nearly three yards round the body; my legs measured a yard round the thigh; and a common suit of clothes cost me twenty pounds."

"Have you ever heard of Daniel Lambert?" I asked, again interrupting my host.

"Of course I have," he answered; "he was a running footman."

The coolness of this reply effectually silenced me, and I allowed the story to proceed without any further interruption.

"My excessive and increasing corpulence," he continued, "filled me with alarm, and I at last placed myself under strict rules of diet. This required a vast deal of sustained resolution, for almost from the beginning of my change in size, I had been afflicted with a voracious appetite. I thought little of devouring at one meal as much as sixteen pounds of meat and bread, and there were times when my appetite was even more ravenous. My drinking was also in proportion to my eating, although I was never intoxicated. All this had to be changed, and I therefore copied the plan of Louis Cornaro, of whom you may have heard. It was a hard struggle, but I persevered. As I thought it prudent not to make a total alteration in my diet suddenly, I confined myself to a pint of ale a day, and used animal food sparingly. This method I soon found to answer to my satisfaction, for I felt easier and lighter, and my spirits became less oppressed. During the next two months, I struck off half my drink, and more than half my animal food. I next gave up malt liquor, and confined myself entirely to water for about a year, at the end of which period I was able to do without any fluid except what I took in the way of medicine. I next avoided cheese, then butter, and at last was able to turn my back upon animal food, and to sustain myself entirely upon pudding made of sea-biscuit. I allowed myself very little sleep, generally going to bed at eight o'clock in the evening, sometimes even earlier, and rising about one o'clock in the morning. My voice, which I had entirely lost for several years, came back to me clear and strong; my flesh became firm, my complexion a good colour; and I reduced my weight at least forty stone."

"Did you ever weigh yourself, to test the truth of these figures?" I asked.

"Never. Prejudiced by a commonly prevailing superstition, which, of course, I see the folly of now, I never suffered myself to be put in the scales, either during the state of my extreme corpulence, or after my reduction."

"Why did you subject yourself to such very strict rules of diet?" I inquired: "stricter even than those which governed your teacher, Cornaro?"

"Because I was ten years older than Cornaro was when he began his regimen, and I therefore

thought, on that account, a more severe and abstemious course was necessary. I was greatly influenced by Dr. Cheyne's opinion that Cornaro would probably have lived longer, had his regimen been more strict. Dr. Cheyne was right, as I have tested by experiment, and I have been right in following the advice of Dr. Cheyne. For more than a hundred years I have been fed upon a pudding, the composition of which you may be curious to learn, especially as you show a tendency to become stout, and are evidently not in very sound health. Take three pints of skimmed milk, boil them and pour them on one pound of the best sea-biscuit, broken into pieces; do this overnight, and then leave the ingredients to stand together until the following morning, when you may add two eggs. This compound, being boiled in a cloth about the space of an hour, will become a pudding of sufficient consistency to be cut with a knife. No matter what may have been the season—what festivities were going on—what temptations there were to a little self-indulgence—I allowed myself only a pound and a half of this pudding at four or five o'clock in the morning, as my breakfast, and the same quantity at noon, as my dinner. What is the result? At the age of a hundred and ninety——"

"I beg your pardon," I said, "you told me you were only one hundred and seventy-six."

"Did I?" he answered; "well, say one hundred and seventy-six, then—we'll not quarrel about fourteen years—at this age I am able to live cheerfully without company in what, as I before remarked, you contemptuously style 'a desert.' I am active and vigorous, and in full possession of more than my proper faculties. I am able, at times, to pick out colours with my eyes closed, and to read a book with my fingers' ends. Sometimes I can walk in my sleep with even more security and speed than when I am awake; which I look upon as a proof that my system of diet is correct."

My host's story might probably have continued for several hours longer, as I really had not sufficient determination to stop it, if we had not been interrupted at this point by the appearance of a third person at the door of the hut. The new comer was a man about forty, and, if dress were any sign of quality, I might have thought that I had been entertained by the servant in the absence of the master. I was not, however, left long in suspense as to the relation in which the two islanders stood to each other, for my ragged host immediately addressed the new comer in a loud authoritative tone:

"Pampered menial! Take off that dandy coat, and blow the fire."

The new comer obeyed this rude command rather slowly and sullenly, muttering something about not being so fond of rags as some people were.

"Silence!" again shouted my ragged host. "If Crusoe and Friday quarrel in private, let them preserve a certain decency before strangers."

I fancied preparations might be made to feed me with the sea-biscuit pudding I had heard described, and had not felt any particular wish to taste; so, as my time on the island was drawing to a close, I rose to go. My host insisted on the "pampered menial" seeing me to the coast, and my proposed guide assured me that no one else was to be found upon the island.

"Worse luck," he said, as we left the hut together, "for he does try the best of tempers."

"You mean our eccentric friend yonder?" I remarked, inquiringly, pointing back to the hut.

"Yes," he said. "If his friend didn't pay me very well, I should pitch him over, like a shot."

"Isn't there something the matter with his head?" I asked, trying to put the question very delicately.

"Sometimes I think there is; sometimes I don't. He took to this place because he was fond of fishing, though we never catch much worth speaking of. Even what the snacks catch is sent up to London, and we have to get it down again by signals."

"Fish?" I said; "I thought he lived upon nothing but pudding."

"Oh, he's been pitching that yarn into you, has he? He eats a precious sight more than I do, and thinks a good deal more about his dinner."

"I suppose," I said, "you have heard the extraordinary story of his life?"

"Heard it?" he returned, "I should think I have! He goes over it about three times a week, or one hundred and fifty times a year. It all comes of reading of one book—the only book he's got with him—called Wilson's Wonderful Characters. He muddles them all up together, and then goes and swears he's been through all the adventures, because his name happens to be Peter Wilson!"

"That looks like madness," I said.

"So his friends think who live on the mainland opposite," returned my guide, "but I think the madness shows itself most in living here. They'll find that out some day, when I leave them, and they have to advertise for another 'companion' to my gentleman."

When we arrived at the coast, we found my boatmen within hail. Before embarking, I inquired my guide's name, and, as he answered me, he seemed to have something on his mind.

"Can I do anything for you on the opposite shore?" I asked, willing to make myself useful to the lonely islander.

"Well," he said, "there's one thing I want to ask you. Is that census return, as you call it, going to be put into print?"

"Undoubtedly," I replied.

"What have you got him down as—the party up at the hut?"

"Peter Wilson: no profession: age, one hundred and seventy-six."

"You can let that stand, if you like, but don't

go and call the island a private madhouse, and put me down as a keeper."

"How shall I describe you?" I asked, willing to humour him.

"Call me a shepherd," he said. "Because I've got some friends on the opposite shore—especially a female friend—and I don't want to be laughed at."

I complied with his request in filling up the official form; and he stands in his country's account-books as Giles Storks: profession, shepherd: age, forty-two.

INCORRIGIBLE ROGUES.

Most persons who, when the "Latest Intelligence" from America and elsewhere has been mastered, turn to that part of the daily newspaper which contains the record of what takes place in our law and police courts, must have been especially struck lately by the continual recurrence of cases of violence of a terrible and unusual sort. Murder, manslaughter, and murderous assault are crimes which appear to be decidedly on the increase. At the recent Quarter Sessions at Birmingham, the Recorder, speaking on this subject, says: "In the two last months of November and December, during which the winter assizes have been held, together with the usual sessions at the Old Bailey, the number of convictions for murder has amounted to twenty at the least, passing by culprits who, by verdicts of manslaughter, have escaped the penalty of death in cases which my feeble perspicuity fails to distinguish from foul and detestable murders. This period," the Recorder goes on to say, "as there are three assizes in each twelve months, may be considered to furnish us with the criminal statistics of one-third of the year, and would, therefore, if the growth of the crime be the same in all seasons, yield an annual total of sixty proved murders."

The Recorder admits the possibility that the winter months may show a larger calendar of crime than other parts of the year. He also admits that these offences are infectious, and that criminals imitate each other. Thus, he would extract a hope that this first third of the criminal year may be no criterion of the other two-thirds, and that the total of sixty murders in a year may not be attained. And, indeed, if it were, we might well feel uneasiness, the average of convictions during the last twelve years being only seventeen, while the highest number—namely that in 1856—only amounted to thirty-one.

Independently of exceptional cases, such as the military murders by which the past year has been characterised, deeds of violence committed by persons not previously members of the criminal population, there remains a large amount of crime to which rule and calculation may be applied, and valuable results obtained by doing so. The offences of isolated individuals stimulated by revenge or other bad passions to single acts of crime, can never be considered useful or to the purpose. It is with the criminal population alone that we can deal statistically, and here the ob-

servations of those who make such subjects their especial study are of infinite value.

The chaplain of the Warwickshire county jail states that the year 1857 has been the only year since the prison at Birmingham was opened in which the rate of the commitments to the population has been greater in Birmingham than the average rate throughout England and Wales. The cause of the exceptional increase of crime in this borough during that year can only be traced by the chaplain to the return to it in the same year of an exceptionally large number of convicts returned from penal servitude before the expiration of their sentences." The Recorder, taking this as his text, goes on to say: "I have learnt from your chief superintendent of police that the return to Birmingham of one discharged convict possessing ability and influence has very materially increased the number of commitments in a particular year."

How should the case be otherwise? No one can doubt the great influence of example and companionship upon all classes of society; while, on the lower grade and on the young, it is most powerful of all. Who shall measure the evil brought into a school or university by one black sheep. The contamination is gradual but certain, and many characters of the weaker sort will, by bad association, receive that bias towards evil which was all that was necessary for their ruin. It is so, as we all have opportunities of seeing, among domestic servants. Their power of injuring each other is immense. Take the case of a small establishment, consisting, we will say, of a couple of servant-maids, who have been brought up from the country. They are uninitiated in the slang of the London members of their tribe, and are contented and happy. They can exist without followers. They can do all the work of the house with ease and cheerfulness. They will take what it may be convenient to give them for dinner and supper, rather astonished, in fact, at fare so much superior to what they have been accustomed to in their own poverty-stricken homes. In short, they are good and contented servants, and their mistress congratulates herself with reason, when she hears her friends complaining of domestic troubles.

But how long does this last? On some special occasion of a grand cleaning, or some equally miserable disturbance, "help" is sent for, and the char-woman of discord is flung into this happy family. This worthy lady is kind enough to enlighten the two injured innocents to whose rescue she has come, as to their "rights." For these she exhorts them to stand up, as other servants do. What! will they "put up" with cold meat? are they satisfied to be deprived of the visit of their male relatives and other friends "from the country," whom they might regale so pleasantly and cheaply with their patron's food? Well, they are poor-spirited things if they allow themselves to be put upon like that!

If the char-woman does not step in, the tempter will come in another form. One of

your provincial maidens is obliged to leave you for some reason or other, and her place is supplied by a metropolitan substitute. How soon is a change observable in the establishment! The new servant has made the other discontented. She objects to do things which she now considers "out of her place." She is perpetually a martyr, is injured, lazy, and at last utterly saucy and insubordinate.

Does not all this go to prove the great influence of the lower classes on each other? Unhappily, the worst among them are ordinarily the strongest—strongest in will, in character, in mind. Their companions are afraid of their sullenness, and afraid of their overbearing natures, while at the same time they admire their daring, and in many cases regard with a kind of interest akin to hero-worship the notoriety which a well-known malefactor obtains as a public character. Surely it is a mistake to send one of these incorrigible rogues back to the society from which he has been temporarily removed. An incorrigible boy is expelled from school lest he should do harm there, and an incorrigible man should be expelled from society for the same reason.

To return once more to the charge of the Recorder at Birmingham. His opinion as to the working of the present ticket-of-leave system is, as one might expect, very discouraging. "It is," says the Recorder, "of much less importance than could be wished, whether the convict be discharged because he has completed his sentence, or upon ticket-of-leave before such completion; because, as we have been repeatedly informed in the speeches of Sir George Grey, the grant of a ticket-of-leave by no means implies reformation in the recipient. And so long as, in addition to this defect in our practice, the executive government in England shall take no steps to enforce the good conduct of the ticket-of-leave man by the revocation of his license until he is convicted of a new offence, but, on the contrary, whatever may be the profligacy of his life, and the notoriety of his want of any visible means of subsistence, shall still leave him at large to follow his evil course; so long will the presence of discharged convicts in any town be a severe calamity to its inhabitants, stimulating veteran criminals to pernicious activity, and augmenting their forces by the addition of many a recruit."

It seems that in Ireland a much stricter supervision is exercised over liberated convicts than with us, and of the result of this surveillance the Recorder speaks in terms of eulogy. "I cannot," he says, "express to you the mortification I endure when I compare the state of things in England with that in Ireland. I have made two visits, at the distance of four years, to that island, for the purpose of scrutinising with care and diligence the working of the Irish convict system under the superintendence of Captain Crofton and his meritorious colleagues. There you will find that the grant of a ticket-of-leave is never made except on strong proofs of reformation; but as the strongest proofs may

be deceptive, and as even a convict truly reformed may relapse when he becomes entirely his own master, the work of supervision is not nominal but real, and is most efficiently continued during his whole probation—that is, until the sentence passed upon him by the judge has expired. If, before that period, he is found to deviate into courses suggestive of relapse into a criminal career, or of proclivity towards crime, his license is instantly cancelled, and he is carried back to jail. . . . The Congress for the Promotion of Social Science, held in Dublin during the last summer, drew there a concourse of English, many of whom were conversant with the treatment of criminals, and deeply interested in its amendment, and a large number of persons, including many magistrates, all competent to form a trustworthy opinion upon the subject, came away convinced of the great superiority of the Irish over the English method of treatment."

If it be true that in Ireland there is a "marvellous diminution in the return of old convicts to jail, so common an occurrence in England," it is certainly obvious that the Irish plan is better than the English, and that a system of supervision exercised over the liberated convict is the right one. The fact is that a Preventive Police Force is as necessary as a Detective Police. In more than one case recently the police have appeared in this phase, and notoriously bad characters have most properly been arrested for loitering about certain localities under such circumstances as to give rise to the presumption that they had a burglary in contemplation. This is as it should be, but even such vigilance as this is not all that is necessary.

What we contend for is simply that the incorrigible rogue—to use a legal phrase—should be kept away from the rest of the community. A more dangerous animal could hardly be at large than one of these often-convicted ruffians, who returns when his sentence is expired to his old haunts and his old companions. Far from being improved by his punishment, he is probably only hardened, and bears an additional grudge against society, by which he has a sort of vague impression that he has been hardly used. What use is it to let that terrible being loose among us? How is he going to live? He has no settled means of occupation. He has been a vagabond from boyhood. Is it likely that now, coming out of prison for the fifth or sixth time, he will suddenly become honest and industrious? He will do nothing of the sort. He has returned among us simply to qualify for readmission into one of those great asylums for rogues, of which he has already had so much experience. Unfortunately, it is only by going through a new curriculum of crime that he can so qualify himself. Before those prison doors open again to receive him, some poor old lady, as in the recent case at Maida-hill, will have been subjected to cruelties which it is intolerable to think or write of, while two or three youngsters hovering on the outskirts of crime will have been induced, by this ruffian's example, to take

the fatal plunge. Murderous attacks, robberies in the streets, assaults on the police incapacitating them sometimes for a time, sometimes altogether for the discharge of their duties—these are some of the evils certain to result from the liberation of that incorrigible rogue. And yet, knowing this, we release him. Misplaced leniency!

But is it leniency? Is it leniency to that lonely and invalid lady whose grey hairs are stained with blood? Is it leniency to the wretched lads who are contaminated by this man's example? Is it leniency to the policeman whose life is beaten out of him, or who is left to crawl years afterwards a cripple to the grave? Is it leniency to the sinner himself to leave him to the misguiding of his own corrupt nature, and to suffer him to heap the load of new guilt on his already guilty soul?

The true leniency, both to society at large and to the criminal himself is, to deprive him of that liberty with which he may not safely be trusted; to keep him continually in confinement; to mitigate as far as may be the expense of his maintenance by finding out on what laborious task he may usefully and securely be employed, and to keep him to that task under strong and constant supervision, trusting him no more after he has so many times proved to demonstration his utter untrustworthiness. Trusting him no more? Nay—that is saying too much. At last, towards the end of his days, when years and years have intervened between him and his crimes, when age, if not habit, has unfitted him for violent deeds, then, indeed, some milder sway might be exercised over him, some more tolerable asylum provided, in which he might end his days. For the storm that has lasted through the day will sometimes clear away in the evening, and the sun, though weak and watery, will show for an hour before it finally goes down.

RUSSIAN TRAVEL.

TULA is a large government town of the second class, with more than fifty thousand inhabitants. It lies on the direct southern military road to Odessa, rather more than a hundred miles from Moscow, and five hundred and twenty from St. Petersburg. Famous for cutlery and ironmongery, Tula is called the Birmingham of Russia, and in one sense it is so; for it is astonishing how fond the Tula manufacturers are of English names and marks. The name of Rodgers, figures on many a bad Russian knife and razor. Goods can be, and are, made at Tula almost equal to the best English; the great bulk, however, of the manufacture is bad in material, and worse in workmanship.

A wise trader will endeavour to improve his quality, establish a good name, and beat his rivals. He will classify his wares, and depends for prosperity on the faith of his customers in his desire to let them have exactly what they want. A Russian (there are exceptions to all general rules, but in this matter unusually few) seems to care

nothing for good name in trade, or for the prospect of future transactions with the person whom he serves. He is no speculator, even for his own benefit; he does not look past the first haul; and he gets the better of his customers, if he can, on all occasions. If he can reduce the quality of his goods while maintaining their appearance and prices, he is triumphant and will cross himself in thankful devotion before his joss. I would be loth to libel any class of men, but I appeal to every Englishman who has been in Russia, and has had dealings with the natives, for a confirmation of my own twelve years' experience. I appeal to their own saying that "a Jew in bargain is outdone by an Armenian, but a Russian can outwit them both." There is no denying that a Russian moushick merchant is in all commercial dealings an incorrigible cheat. It takes more than a wide-awake Yankee to make a "deal" with a Muscovite.

The emperor, always honest and earnest for the improvement of the country, on his last visit to Moscow called together a number of the principal merchants and manufacturers, and remonstrated with them on this prevailing bad practice. Great complaints had been made to him by his political agents, in those countries which bought from Russia, regarding the wholesale and shameful cheating used by the Moscow merchants in their dealings with the Orientals. They had, it seemed, not only reduced the qualities of their merchandise to the lowest possible degree, but had sometimes even packed the insides of their bales with rubbish, leaving a slight coating of the real article at the top and bottom. This conduct had given the government agents great trouble in forming treaties and commercial relations, and if not abandoned would bring down upon them (the emperor justly told the merchants) the ruin of their trade. This friendly and sensible remonstrance was accepted by some of them in good and honest faith; they pleaded guilty and promised reformation. Whether the promise has been kept, it is not yet possible to know.

A fair glimpse of the condition of a people may be got through their commercial character. For this reason, I turn from the merchant arraigned before the Czar, to the shopkeeper in the market or bazaar. The system of chaffering, bargaining, beating-down, and wrestling (so to speak), for coopecks, is almost universal. I don't think there are half a dozen shops in Moscow and Petersburg together, that sell on the principle of a fixed price, and no abatement. Trade is huckstering, and no common huckstering either; it is hard work—like nothing in England but the sale of an old cow or horse, at a country fair, by a veteran cow or horse couper. To come off with a few articles bought at their value is a work of time, patience, and skill. A newly imported foreigner, of whatever nation, is a mark for plunder. If he go alone to buy, he falls an easy prey. If he be accompanied by professional interpreters, it is not much better, as the shopkeeper expects the interpreter to call next day for twenty or thirty per cent commis-

sion on any purchase made. Let me illustrate the system by a case (not uncommon) which is my own case.

I often prefer to do my own bargaining, and being in want of a pair of long fur boots and a portmanteau, before taking a southern survey, I passed all the English magazines, the German, French, and other foreign establishments in Blacksmiths Bridge-street, and descended to the lower regions of Moscow, called the town or "gorod." This part is the old capital of Russia, and walled round, having the Kremlin in the centre. The entrance is under a heavy arch, guarded by images and lamps. One ought to feel the more secure from knavery after passing these representatives of saints, but let the Englishman here mount guard over his own pockets.

My search was along the interminable lines of dark booths, which constitute the "Gostino Dvor," or favourite market-place (and here it is *always* twilight: that being the light in which a customer should examine what an able trader has to sell). At length, after an hour's search, I found the line sacred to Crispin and leather goods, and was hauled into one of its booths by the touter at the door. At first, I could not discern objects distinctly; but when my eyes had adapted themselves to the obscure light of the place, I saw the presiding genius bending before me, in the shape of a venerable mild-visaged man, with flowing beard, who held in one hand a tumbler of smoking tea, and in the other a lump of black bread, on which was a quantity of salt, and half a raw herring. He took the last gulp of his tea, laid down his delicious sandwich, ran his dirty hands through his great beard, stroked it affectionately, rubbed off the remaining grease of his hands on his caftan, turned reverentially to the joss in the corner, crossed himself, and then signified his desire to know what I might want? How could such a man be an extortioner! See his frugality—black bread and herring. Look at his shop: a mere booth, containing no expensive shopmen. Besides, has he not in my presence just appealed to Heaven? Surely that is a guarantee for fair and honest dealing. Let us see.

"I want," I said, "a pair of the best fur boots, and a good portmanteau."

Although the walls and ceiling were crowded with all kinds of articles of his calling, he began to pull out a large drawer. The handle came off while he pulled, and he fell back on a great pyramid of boxes, boots, portmanteaus, and trunks, built up in the centre of the floor, overturning the whole in a confused mass.

"Ough!" he said, "God help me! This is an unlucky omen." And again he crossed himself, with a view, as I supposed, to a fresh start. The wreck having been put to rights, and the drawer opened at length, the dealer produced a pair of long boots lined with fur.

"There, your honour, is the very thing you want. Most excellent boots; of the best quality to be found in Moscow. Yea Boch!" (God's truth.)

Nevertheless, as my experience assured me that a Russian shopkeeper invariably begins by producing the worst article he has, I tossed the boots from me, saying, "Won't do; better." Another drawer was opened, a third and fourth were gone over, with the same result. On the fifth attempt I condescended to examine the articles produced: the good man having declared, with the usual oath, that each in its turn was the best he had. The soles of the boots in my hand were of pasteboard, with a thin coating of leather neatly glued over it, and nicely polished up. The fur was cat's hair (without any skin), also glued to the legs, and the legs themselves were of the thinnest possible horse-hide.

"Listen; these will not do; you must not detain me. If you have not any better, I must go."

"No, your honour, better than these cannot be made. They will wear all your life, Yea Boch!"

"Then I must go to another shop."

"Stop! I will look again. Ah! Heaven help me, here they are!"

Better, but not up to my mark. None of the boots would do; and in despair I made for the door, but was intercepted, and implored to remain a moment. A pair of excellent-looking boots was now fished out from a corner. The legs came considerably above the knees, the fur was a real skin, and the soles were evidently sewed, not pasted on. These I thought would do, and I laid them aside until I should have selected the portmanteau.

I was shown articles made of pasteboard to represent leather, of paper and wood, of paper and leather, and of leather as thin and as useless as paper. As they were produced, I was informed, with the usual solemn asseveration, that each in its turn was the best that could be made, and all solid leather. Another attempted escape to the door brought out the real thing: at least, what had to me all the appearance of a real solid leather portmanteau. Now came the tug of war—the price. The last half-hour had been mere skirmishing. My friend began a long eulogium on the goods: the words pouring in a torrent through his beard. They were everything conceivable that is good; would last an age; were made specially for a prince; I might travel in the boots to Siberia and back, if so inclined, and never cool my feet; the portmanteau would go with me to China, or one hundred times over the Urals; the emperor had no better portmanteau. And between each clause of his eulogy he cried "Yea Boch!" He concluded by asking seventeen roubles for the boots, and thirty-one for the portmanteau: in all forty-eight roubles, or seven pounds ten, and at that price he was making me a present of them, "Yea Boch!"

I offered sixteen roubles, or two pounds ten.

"Sixteen would not pay the making; but hear me! Take them for forty. I shall lose the rest. What's to be done?"

"No, take sixteen, or I go instantly."

"Yea Boch! it is too little by half; but hear for the last time." Here he seized me by one hand, put an arm round my neck, and hissed in my ear, "Thirty roubles. There! I am giving them."

"Sixteen is my last word." I said good day, and made for the door, but had scarcely got outside when he fastened on me by both shoulders, dragged me back into the shop, and bringing his great beard and greasy face close before mine, as if to impart a great secret, recapitulated all his enomiums, with greater force and with more earnest appeals to "Boch" to attest his truth—all which he concluded by asking twenty-five roubles. This time I made so determined a bolt that I succeeded in getting two doors off, on the way to a rival establishment, and was already in the hands of five or six touters pulling me in different directions, when again my old friend came running after me.

"Come back, baron, come! What a hurry you are in"—I had given him a precious hour—"I will take less."

Not wishing to go through the preliminaries in another shop to which I had already submitted, and knowing the shops to be all much alike, I returned to the fray, and after haggling and chaffering for another twenty minutes, during which my friend passed through stages of twenty, nineteen, eighteen and a half, eighteen, &c., we finally concluded the very stiff bargain, at my original offer: sixteen roubles: which the dealer took with most placid satisfaction. I felt victorious, and said, How shameful of you to ask three times more than you take, and tell so many lies! "Oh!" he replied, "words do not rob your pocket. I am no thief. It is all fair bargaining."

As I left the place I saw him signing the cross before the joss, whether in thankfulness for a good bargain or prayer for a pardon I cannot tell; but after I got home I scrutinised the purchases in a good light, and found that I had no cause to be vainglorious. I was no exception to the common rule, but had been so completely cheated that I would gladly have disposed of my bargain at a loss of fifty per cent. I learnt afterwards that this same shopkeeper is a serf, worth four hundred thousand roubles; that he owns ten shops in Moscow, and some in Petersburg; and that while he ate black bread and herring, he had two extravagant sons at the university, and daughters accomplished in all the graces of a Russian education, enjoying horses, equipages, and a grand house. Such instances of wealth accumulated by frugality and extortion, are not rare among the Russians.

In Tula I saw the usual abundance of churches and popes (priests), barracks and soldiers, merchants and hucksters, peasants in dirty sheepskin coats, officers and gospodins in uniform driving in stylish equipages drawn by fast trotters from the steppes, or cobs from Siberia. There were all forms of Russian private vehicle and public conveyances, with two, three, or

four broken-winded bent-kneed sore-backed uncleaned hacks to each, and driven by ragged men in long grey coats of felt, and little hats four inches high, stuck full of the ends of peacocks' feathers. Burnt-down houses by the dozen lay in ruins: the remains of fires. There were streets paved with boulders, picked into confusion and left in a chaos of hills and chasms. The inns were, as usual, full of tobacco-smoke and paved with dirt, alive with tarakans—the Russian representatives of the black beetle—and busy with silent whispering groups of tea-drinkers. But these are only the common outside features of a town in the heart of Russia. Of Tula proper, I saw nothing; my time being occupied in the care of our goods and repacking of our conveyances. We found it necessary to remove all our property to our own rooms, and to keep good watch over it.

We only missed one pillow, a rug, two boxes of sardines, and a bottle of wine, until Harry, who had been storming about the place in search of the lost articles, caught one of the red-shirted waiters coming out of our room with a bottle under his shirt, which proved to be castor-oil stolen out of the medicine-chest. Harry considered it fit punishment to make him swallow a large dose. But when the effects of the dose began to display themselves, the man declared himself poisoned, and was carried to a hospital hard-by, while we and our packages were placed under the surveillance of the police.

Police-men brought to the inn stood sentry at the doors of our rooms, and we were prisoners for nearly two hours, when a doctor from the hospital, fortunately for us a jolly Russ, came with a captain of police. While the captain of police tackled Harry, who, ignorant of the language, answered "Da, da" (yes, yes), to everything, I explained to the doctor what had really happened. The worthy doctor having got hold of the oil-bottle, cried,

"Bravo! Poison! The most excellent medicine in pharmacy. Look here, captain. The pig" (meaning the waiter) "was taken ill with cholera; cramps, spasms, vomiting here—mind you, here in this room—before madame and mademoiselle. They run to the next room, so does my friend here, a great English my lord. What could they do? But, sir, the case was desperate. This gentleman" (pointing to Harry) "is a great doctor, accompanying my lord and his family; there was no time to send for me. What does he do? He opens his great medicine-box—look, there it is—and gives the dying moushick a great dose of apernecious celantacus heprecaincos masta, the best remedy in the world for cholera. I tell you, 'Yea Boch!' there now, that's the truth."

"But," said the captain, "the moushick, doctor, how is he?"

"Ah! the pig!" (and here he spat on the ground in contempt), "I left the beast quite well and sleeping. I will answer for him. Come, captain, let us go. Poison! That is a good joke! Come, captain. Safe journey. Good-by!"

The police captain was satisfied, however re-

luctantly. With two bottles of something better than castor-oil, and a fee, which the doctor might or might not divide with the captain, I paid the cost of Harry's thoughtlessness. As we were about to start, Galen approached the carriage, and took me aside.

"Terrible fellow that fierce-looking friend of yours. He looks as if he could fight the town and eat up the governor-general; but tell him to 'box'em,' and don't let him prescribe medicine again for any moushick. No one dares give medicine here but the faculty, and you cannot buy any but through a certificate from one of our noble profession. When you return this way, remember my name; send for me. Grog, beef-steak, box'em, Palmerston! Ha, ha! Adieu."

Thus throwing his whole stock of English into his final speech, he waved his farewell, and off we started for Orel, the next main point of our journey.

We had spent eight hours in Tula, so that it was eight at night before we left, and dark. One of our tarantases had been exchanged for a fresh one, the other not being considered safe: and in the new vehicle I had put my children, taking my own post for the night beside the driver on the box. All had been comfortably arranged for a long four days' journey without stopping, except to change horses. We had proceeded swiftly and comfortably for six hours, when, in leaving a small village where we had changed for the fourth time, and in turning a rather sharp corner, my tarantas upset with a smash. Thanks to the inside packing of pillows and beds, nobody was hurt. Our calls for help brought the "starosta" and his man from the station-house, and by their aid we were enabled to resume our journey. I should not have mentioned this small incident had it not been to show another phase of Russian manners.

The starosta here referred to, was the chief or overseer of the stables, but the word has a more extended sense. It is applied to all overseers, bailiffs, and chief men over the peasant class in stables, hospitals, farms, villages, and estates. The starosta has great influence over the peasants, and should be appointed by the peasants themselves, as was the case in days of yore before the peasantry were serfs. The name implies age and experience, and in those more primitive times discreet elders were elected by the peasants, in public meetings assembled, to represent them and take care of their interests. To these starostas they rendered a willing submission, indeed they and the sotniks (overseers of a hundred) formed the only defences of the peasant against the baron. Peter the Great found it almost impossible fully to raise his taxes from the migratory peasantry, who in his day possessed the land. The tax-gatherer could never find the same men twice; they were gone, and new tenants, or no tenants, occupied the land. Peter made, therefore, a law that at a certain date every peasant or cultivator of the ground was to be a fixture on the land he was then farming, and that land only

was his. All that became surplus under this arrangement, the emperor appropriated to himself. Peter divided the country into governments or districts; appointed a governor in the principal town of each, giving him soldiers, police, and all the machinery of command. He then established a poll-tax, and, giving to the progenitors of the present barons, grants of land in these districts, made *them* responsible for the yearly payment of this tax. The government looked to the barons for it; and they, backed by the military power of the governor, levied it from the peasants. In the disputes arising out of this arrangement, the starosta represented the people, and he was chosen by them for this purpose, amongst others. They were not then serfs, but the levying of these taxes in course of time furnished the barons with an excuse for enslaving them. Peasants who could not, or who would not, pay, had their land taken from them, and were forced to work the land belonging to the baron. The barons, having to pay for all, introduced compulsory labour, more or less to meet their difficulty; and the peasants, being ignorant and priest-ridden, were easily robbed of their lands and rights by their self-constituted tax-collecting masters. Thus it was that, in course of time, they came to be regarded as the property of these men, and were bought and sold with the land, as beasts of burden. The government connived at all this.

So long as the tax was paid on each soul, all was right, and the passport gave means of determining the numbers upon each estate and village. In this way have the barons gradually, and surely, appropriated to themselves the land, labour, property, and persons, of the peasantry. And, this being the case, instead of calling the new edict an emancipation of serfs, it ought strictly to be called a restoration of the peasants' rights.

But the starosta, while this change was taking place, was not what he was first designed to be—the peasants' delegate. He has become a tool in the hands of the baron and the stewards: chosen not for his age and experience, but more frequently because of a certain kind of superior intelligence, and sometimes for a scrupulous devotion to his masters. Now, if the steward be a bad one, the starosta must be bad, because he is the exponent of the steward's will. Woe to the poor peasant when this is the case! The starosta knows intimately the domestic history, feelings, and conduct, of every serf on an estate; he pairs the young for marriage (not often compelling them against their inclination), and takes them before the baron or steward for his sanction. He selects the conscripts for the army: those who are to be sent out on "obrok;" and those who are to stay at home. He has the appointment of the different gangs of labourers on the estate, and it is he who, either with his own hand or by deputy, punishes the serfs for real or imaginary faults. In plain terms, he is the slave-driver of the American plantations, with this very material difference, that he is invariably a serf himself: one of the class over which he is placed; often, there-

fore, it will happen that he hates the steward, who is generally a German, and quietly contrives with the other serfs to thwart the steward's plans. Many tales are told of dreadful acts committed by serfs, at the instigation of the starosta, when goaded to madness by the tyranny and cruelty of stewards. I could tell some of these tales of horror, but why rake up the memory of past atrocities, when the whole system is doomed to destruction by the late emancipation edict?—one of those courageous acts for the advance of civilisation by which Alexander the Second will be honoured, centuries hence, whatever may be said in his own time by carping politicians. When this edict comes into force the starosta's occupation is gone.

The starosta who had come to our assistance imagined that my yeamshick was drunk, so, without more ado, he began to kick and beat the poor man in a most brutal manner. Not content with his own blows, he caused two of his satellites to aid in the kicking and beating. The poor man, notwithstanding our continual remonstrances, was kicked, beaten with a stick, slapped in the face, and bore it all without saying a word. Abuse and blows rained on him, until my friend Harry could stand it no longer. His English love of fair play was scandalised at seeing one man thus beaten by three, and, had I not restrained him, he would soon have made short work of the starosta and his gang. But the hindrance of a police difficulty could not be risked. We waited, therefore, impatiently until the men were tired of knocking the poor driver about. He was then sent back to the stables, and a boy of twelve years, or rather less, was put in his place on the box. Against this proceeding I strongly protested, for I thought the exchange much for the worse. Remonstrance, however, had no effect. The starosta assured me that he had not in all his gang a better driver than the boy; besides, he was brother to the pig who had overturned us; and as the horses belonged to them—or rather to their master—they must be driven back by one of them to the station whence they came. So, to the very tender mercies of the boy we were committed until daybreak.

MEMBERS OF THE V. C.

"Two other thieves, of the names of M'Kenzie and Holmes, were captured last evening by our patriotic fellow-citizens, the members of the V.C. (Vigilance Committee)." This I read in the *Alta California*, on a certain morning ten years ago. Too well I knew the interpretation of this paragraph. Two more wretched creatures, arrested perhaps for comparatively venial crimes, were about to be imprisoned, tortured, and finally put to death, by a merciless body of men, who having taken all power out of the hands of an effete police, perpetrated unheard-of horrors under the sole authority of Judge Lynch. I need not say that to me, as to all English residents in San Francisco, the American institution of "lynching" was revolting. It was un-

doubtedly true, that before the V.C. was organised, theft was usual and murder common. Nearly every morning, corpses of men killed in the dark by slung shot were found in the streets. I, like others, had had more than one escape from such assassination, and I owe my life probably to the possession of a feeble-minded pistol, which, though declining to go off above once in six times, had a highly-burnished barrel, easily seen; and a noisy lock, easily heard; which weapon I always cocked and handled ostentatiously when passing dangerous corners at night, on my way home to Happy Valley. It is also true that the police were thought to be aiders and abettors of crime. But better—a thousand times better—even this, than the open day murdering by the "Vigilance," who had gone on from one excess to another, until some of its more sanguinary members openly announced their intention to hang any one, even for the theft of a "red cent," or, as we should say at home, of a brass farthing.

Yet on the evening of the day on which I read the before cited paragraph, I entered myself as a member of the Vigilance Committee! Yes. Inconsistent as the act may seem, considering my opinion of that body, I not only joined it, but also persuaded a good friend of mine to do the same. His christian name was "Dave." He was a stalwart hunter from Texas, who, if he had had brains in proportion to his inches, would have been a prodigy; but as he hadn't, he wasn't.

Our committee consisted of several hundred men, well armed, who were compelled each to take his turn of duty when it came round, and fulfil to the letter the orders of the "almighty majority." They were chiefly American residents of San Francisco, and were popularly supposed to be the most well-to-do and respectable merchants in the city. We, that is my friend Dave and I, entered the premises of the V.C. with considerable curiosity, and found them to consist of a large wooden building of two stories, which had formerly been a store. Business was transacted in the top story: a long naked-looking room, with two doors at the front instead of windows, over which were placed outside, a couple of small cranes fitted with pulleys and ropes, formerly used to hoist goods out of the street. They were now used to hoist men into another world. In a word, they were the ready-to-hand gallows of the Vigilance Committee. At the end of the room opposite these doors, was a post to which were then chained two miserable objects, the prisoners Holmes and McKenzie. Six armed men, regularly relieved, kept guard over them night and day.

A few days passed away, during which, as usual, "sensation" articles on the "new" prisoners appeared in the papers, which were eagerly read by the public. In fact, other amusements being fearfully expensive, the public—that is, the American element of it—owed at that period its chief and cheapest excitement to the enterprising operations of the V.C. If the men of other nations did not relish this sort

of literature, their disgust is partly to be referred to the fact that they were called upon to furnish the hangable material. But as the V.C. used great delicacy in meddling with representatives of its own nation, the American public breakfasted cheerfully, with a "sensation" for relish at ten cents: that being the price of a morning paper. The confessions of the prisoners were continued from day to day, and consisted chiefly of rambling reminiscences of highway robberies, burglaries, and petty larcenies. In giving them to the public, the V.C. had no doubt a certain end in view, and that was, to excuse or palliate its own proceedings.

"But," the reader may inquire, "were these confessions valid?" To this query, as a respectable ex-member of the V.C., I reply that they were as valid as the witch confessions of old times, and as confessions generally are, when wrung out by torture.

If I were a hapless prisoner, not knowing from one minute to another when a cruel death would overtake me, and if, while I lay in this anguish, a mob of drunken rowdies were in the habit of invading my prison at all hours—midnight for choice—and putting a rope round my neck, and dragging me about the floor, swearing with horrible imprecations that they would there and then put me to death if I did not confess something; would that be torture? The V.C. did this to their prisoners, when I and Dave were present. At length, no more confessions were to be got out of them. Their memories or their imaginations failed. So much the worse for them. "Nothing now remained," as an eloquent morning paper remarked, "but for the majesty of the people's justice to assert itself." In other words, the prisoners were to be *hanged*, and execution was accordingly ordered for the morrow.

That evening I secretly held "deep converse" with a certain middle-aged determined-looking American gentleman. Dave also was present, and might have held deep converse too if he liked; but being in nowise deep, he didn't. Nevertheless, he paid great heed to what was going on. Here is the *lag* end of our interview.

"At what time do you go on guard to-night?" asked the Determined One.

"At ten o'clock, and are relieved at six in the morning."

"Good; at two o'clock I shall be with you. That will give you plenty of time for your operations. And lookee hy-ar," added the speaker, waxing star and stripy in his accent as he became excited, "if so be you do your parts, gentlemen, sure as shooting I shall do mine. Yes, sir. I guess they reckon up my men pretty considerable mean in this har city; but if I wasn't short of hands—which I am, dreadful—I want to know whose got the grit to work well and risk his skin, when his salary's paid in city scrip at seventy-five cents discount, as my poor fellows' salaries air? Wal, sir! I reckon a few hours will jest figure up whether they kin do their duty or kin not. I'm bound to hev them

prisoners this night or die, sure as my name's M'Kay!"

M'Kay was the name of the stout sheriff of San Francisco: "a good man and true," as he has often proved himself. In a word, Dave and I had enrolled ourselves in the ranks of the V.C. in pursuance of a covert understanding with the sheriff, which had for its express object the rescue of these unhappy prisoners. We should have made the attempt sooner, but that until now we had not been able to get ourselves detailed for guard. In selecting Dave as my comrade in this enterprise, I had not been guided by any great respect for his intellect—which, as I have hinted, was not well developed—but because he was the best-hearted of men, with unlimited strength and pluck, and, above all, was a man who could be thoroughly depended on. Such qualities were wanted for our enterprise, which was of a ticklish nature. The slightest suspicion of our purpose on the part of the V.C. would either doom us to the gallows, or cause our immediate extradition from the state: the lightest punishment inflicted upon those who made themselves obnoxious to the ruling powers. With a sensitive knowledge of our position, I repeated Dave's instructions over and over again to him, before we went on guard.

"Ah's me!" he ejaculated, as he listened rather impatiently, "if we'd only jest a score of mountain boys from down Texas way along now, we'd chaw up yon Vigilance, right away!"

I was obliged to administer a "clinch" upon this digression.

"Dave, have you got a score of mountain boys along?"

"Wal, no."

"Have you got one?"

Dave "guessed he hadn't. Wished he had."

"Then what's the use of talking about 'em?"

Waiting until Dave recovered from this poser, I proceeded: "Remember, there will be six of us on guard to-night. That's four beside ourselves, isn't it? Out of those four, two are neutral. They belong to a moderate party in the V.C., disgusted with its doings, but not daring to confess themselves disgusted. They will not interfere with us if they can keep quiet without compromising themselves. So, there remain only two men point blank against us. With one of these I am acquainted; he is a bar-keeper much given to drams, and I can engage to make him 'safe.' The fourth man, Doctor Jonah Fisk, is hardest to manage of the whole lot. He is one of the chiefs of the V.C., has a great name for 'smartness,' and though he, likewise, drinks, it takes an immense quantity of stuff to shut his eyes. So, Dave, we look to you to account for this man."

"I'll give the black snake eternal goss!" responded Dave, feeling in his boot for his bowie.

"I tell you that violence will never do, and is not to be used. Dave, your instructions are, to engage the doctor at cards; he is a great gambler, and, as we know you are 'some pumpkins' at the 'monongahela' (namely, whisky), only contrive to drink him 'blind,' and all will be well."

"Don't you fear, squire," said Dave; and we parted to make preparations for the evening.

Ten o'clock came. Dave and I arrived at the Vigilance rooms separately, in order to avoid suspicion, and our men were there before us. I found time to shake hands with Sims the bar-keeper, and to exchange a significant look with our two demi-allies: a pair of honest-looking storekeepers. I then turned my attention to the doctor, and surveyed him with eagerness, as an antagonist with whom I was about to engage in a duel of wits to the death. He was a tall lathy man, with a low forehead and small cruel eyes, but by no means wanting in resolution and energy; there was evidence of that in his high cheek-bones and massive lower jaw.

"Well, gents," he said, taking the initiative, "we must be spry to-night, and keep our eyes skinned. There's a report that the sheriff has said he won't let us keep our prisoners nohow. Guess he's jest out there, *he* is! To-morrow night he may have 'em and welcome, not afore; no, sir, ha! ha!" Making this cruel jest ring in the ears of the prisoners, he laughed discordantly. "By-the-by," he resumed, "have those fellows' chain fixings been looked to?"

"I will see to that," I replied; and, hastening to the prisoners under pretence of examining their chains, I passed to each a couple of small watch-spring files and a bottle of sweet oil. What a look of gratitude those broken-down men gave me in return! "Work for your lives," I whispered; "the chain must be cut through in five hours."

Returning to the fire stove, about which the guard was grouped, I found to my vexation that the dunder-headed Dave had got hold of Sims the bar-keeper, and was making insane proposals of drink and cards to him. He had mistaken him for the doctor. "Dave," said I, making my fingers and thumb nearly meet in the brawny arm of the giant as I slewed him round, "this is the doctor."

"Glad to see you, squire," said Dave, with a shambling bow, rubbing his arm.

Two hours passed away in desultory conversation, during which I plied the bar-keeper, nothing loth, with liquor from a demijohn of "monongahela," always kept in the rooms for the refectation of the committee, until he was quite stupefied and went to sleep. The two neutrals feigned to drink, as a pretext for following his example, and Dave, who had now contrived to get on good terms with the doctor, sat a little apart with him, playing "old sledge." The prisoners couched in an attitude of repose in the obscurity of the end of the room, and no doubt worked away with a will at their fetters. All seemed to be going on well. "Two hours hence," I thought, "and the thing is done, without risk or bloodshed; for the doctor—seasoned vessel though he is—must certainly succumb before then, to the innumerable 'smiles' with which Dave is plying him."

Thus time passed on, and from time to time I watched the face of the doctor, rapidly reddening under the influence of his potations, as anxiously

as a pilot consults his compass to be certain of his bearings.

Suddenly, to my unspeakable mortification, I saw him, as if he were struck by a sudden afterthought, throw down his cards, rise from his seat, and walk with unequal steps towards the prisoners, evidently to inspect them. How if he should discover their filed chains! It was a moment of intense suspense to me. But he came back to his seat again, apparently satisfied. "Squire," said Dave, approaching me at this juncture, "yon darned skunk won't play nor drink no more, nohow." I looked at my watch. To my dismay it was half-past one; there was only half an hour to spare before the sheriff would arrive.

The time had come when it was necessary to play my last card.

"Dave," I whispered, "there is only one thing to be done. Pick a quarrel with the doctor and disable him; but remember you must use no weapons."

"All right," replied my cool Texian partisan; adding, admiringly, "what smart head fixins you have got, squire, surely! Why ain't you a land jobber? You'd make a fortin at it down our way."

A few minutes after this, a "difficulty" occurred between the late pair of card-players, arising from a discussion on the last game. It ended in Dave picking up the doctor by his waistband, before he could draw knife or pistol, carrying him in spite of his struggles to the door, and hurling him violently down stairs. This performance achieved, I had the effrontery to go and pick up the fallen man, and condole with him on his misfortune. Though terribly shaken, he was not seriously injured. As I had foreseen, he declined to go up into the room again, but with hideous imprecations against Dave, limped off home.

Shortly after his departure, all the guards were asleep, or shamming sleep. Two o'clock—time up! To the minute, I heard the forcing of the lower door. Then I heard stealthy steps ascending the stairs, and suddenly the door of our room was sent in with a crash, and a dozen policemen leaped upon and disarmed us before one of us could draw a weapon in defence. The sheriff of San Francisco then stood forth.

"M'Kenzie and Holmes," he said, addressing the prisoners, "come forward!"

The persons addressed sprang to their feet. Their chains fell from them to the ground, and they hastened towards the sheriff, who gave them into the custody of his men.

"And now, gentlemen," he said, turning to us, "I wish you good morning. Tell your committee that M'Kay and his men have done their duty. Bring on the prisoners, boys, to the jail; hurry!"

Taken by surprise and disarmed, what were we five disconsolate members of the V.C. to do? Simply, all that we could do, to save our reputations. This was not much, and consisted

in rushing to the engine-house near at hand and tolling the Vigilance bell, never rung save in cases of executions or fires. In a few minutes the whole city was alarmed, and turned out. Scores of half-dressed Vigilance men, weapons in hand, poured into the committee-rooms, but they came too late. M'Kay and his party, having gained the protection of the jail, were safe.

This affair caused a great sensation. Never before had the V.C. met with such a check. They were furious. Luckily for us they did not suspect treachery, and were satisfied with expelling us all from their ranks, except the doctor. I need not say that to Dave and myself this was no calamity.

I wish my story ended happily here, like the old story-books. But, as these miserable details are unfortunately true, I am compelled to add, that the efforts made to save the prisoners, eventually proved futile, owing to the treachery or the carelessness of the police. The V.C., smarting under their defeat, determined to recapture their prisoners, and recover their lost prestige, at any hazard. About three weeks after the night I have described, all the prisoners of the state jail were attending prayers in the chapel one Sunday afternoon. In the midst of the service, a forlorn hope, sworn to succeed or die, organised by the V.C., and composed of some half-dozen young fellows armed to the teeth, burst into the chapel. As there was, by a suspicious coincidence, only one jailer present, they instantly seized on M'Kenzie and Holmes, and bore them away without resistance. A light waggon with a team of six blood horses was ready waiting in the street, and, flinging their miserable victims into it, the desperadoes drove at full gallop through the city to the Vigilance rooms, about three-quarters of a mile distant. As the most effectual means of putting their prey beyond all chance of recapture, it was determined at a hurried consultation of the V.C. to hang the men at once. And so, on the calm summer afternoon of that day sacred to God's service, the deep tones of the Vigilance bell tolled forth its deadly warning.

Wedge in an immense crowd, I stood before the committee-rooms, and looked on at the tragedy I had risked my life to prevent. I dare not give the details of what I saw. Enough that the wretched creatures were put to death in the most shocking manner, and that every wanton atrocity and shameful indignity that the worst passions of man could invent were heaped upon them.

At the completion, in March, of
SIR EDWARD BULWER LYTTON'S NEW WORK,

A STRANGE STORY,

Will be commenced

A NEW NOVEL, BY MR. WILKIE COLLINS.

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